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CONJURING THE MASSES: THE FIGURE OF THE CROWD IN MODERN CHINESE LITERATURE AND VISUAL CULTURE

Abstract

This dissertation argues that the figure of the crowd in literature and visual culture constitutes a crucial component in the emergence and construction of the cultural, political, and historical values of modern China. From Lu Xun's momentous recollection of the lantern slide that compelled him use literature as a means to heal the souls of the Chinese people to Zhang Yimou's spectacular staging of the crowd at the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games, the numerous ways the crowd has been written and pictured not only demonstrates its utility as a motif, but also asserts a mode of literary and visual imagination and even critical inquiry. Although the question of how a work of art or literature stands in relation to the masses has long been a preoccupation of writers, artists, critics, and policymakers in China, this dissertation sees crowd representation as a narrative or visual act that compels us to reconsider the conventional categories that would relegate the crowd as strictly synecdochic for the politically reified nation. To that end, I focus on how concepts such as *crowd* and *mass* are under constant revision, laying bare the negotiations and struggles entailed in the process of defining China collectively.

Chapter One investigates the role of the crowd in the self-construction of the modern intellectual through two themes, the public warning (*shizhong*) in the case of Lu Xun, and the idea of superfluity (*duoyu*) in Qu Qiubai. Chapter Two considers the term "massification" (*dazhonghua*) as a narrative technique of writing the crowd into being,

and in particular the volatile means of its manifestation through violence, death, and annihilation. Chapter Three inquires into the reciprocal relationship between crowd and image in two films (*Big Road* and *Prairie Fire*) as well as propaganda art from the 1930s and the Cultural Revolution, with a special focus of the technological means of exhibiting the crowd. Chapter Four positions filmmaker Zhang Yimou's use of the crowd within the context of the "red legacy" of revolutionary history and technological visuality to argue that efforts to define the Chinese masses remain an ongoing concern.

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INTRODUCTION
FIGURING THE CROWD, CONJURING THE MASSES

This dissertation argues that the figure of the crowd in literature and visual culture constitutes a crucial component in the emergence and construction of the cultural, political, and historical values of modern China. From Lu Xun's 魯迅 momentous recollection of the lantern slide that compelled him to pursue literature as a means of healing the souls of Chinese people to Zhang Yimou's 張藝謀 Olympic staging of the crowd at the center of the Chinese cultural narrative in 2008, the varied and numerous ways the crowd has been written and pictured not only demonstrates its utility as a prominent motif, but also asserts a mode of literary and visual imagination and even critical inquiry. Although the question of how a work of art or literature stands in relation to the masses has long been a preoccupation of writers, artists, critics, and policymakers in China, this dissertation sees crowd representation as a narrative or visual act that compels us to reconsider the conventional categories that would relegate the crowd as strictly synecdochic for the politically reified nation. To that end, I focus on how concepts such as *crowd* and *mass* are under constant revision, laying bare the negotiations and struggles entailed in the ongoing process of defining China collectively.

The physical and material immediacy of the crowd imparts an indeterminate and even dangerous volatility to the more abstract notion of the masses. This fundamental tension, discernible across a wide variety of cultural and political expressions, becomes a key entry point to my analysis of how the crowd figures, and is figured in, the words and images of modern China. While these terms are often conflated (indeed, the Chinese

term *qunzhong* 群眾 may refer to both the tangible crowd and the social imaginary of the masses), by looking at the techniques and methods of representation I show how efforts to generate collectivity through literature and image must grapple with the linguistic, visual, and historical uncertainty embodied in the crowd. Literary and visual representation assumes an active role in this sense: an investment in the possibility (or impossibility) of unity, whether between members of society, reader and text, present and past, or audience and film. What the representations of the crowd reveal, therefore, are not just the incredible power of fiction, images, and film to effect (and not just reflect) history, but also the limits of the grand collective to account for the unintended consequences, uncanny resonances, and haunting aftereffects produced in these efforts.

Before providing brief summaries to the chapters that structure this dissertation, in this introduction I want to address a small portion of the linguistic, critical, fictional, and visual background that informs my discussion. During the late Qing, political and intellectual efforts to modernize China incorporated a grammar of crowds and mass in their writings. The reformist scholars Yan Fu 嚴復 and Liang Qichao 梁啓超, in particular, elucidated a social theory of *qun* 群 that prioritize the role of "the people" in forging the modern nation. This notion of *qun*, while more extensive and distinct from its surface definition of "crowd," exhibits some of the central tensions of the crowd and its representation that reappear throughout this dissertation, namely the relationship between the masses and the nation, the position of the intellectual in relation to the masses, and the function of literature to transform the masses. Nearly contemporaneous to the intellectual inquiry into these issues was the visual exhibition of the crowd in the pages of the

popular newspaper supplement, the *Dianshizhai Pictorial* (Dianshizhai huabao 點石齋畫報). Known for its depictions of the sensational and the fantastic, *Dianshizhai* also showcased the crowd as a modern social force. The illustrations of the crowd that appeared copiously in *Dianshizhai* testifies to not just the social presence of the crowd in urban society at the time, but also to its visual appeal as modern spectacle. What's more, the technological means of production and dissemination of the *Dianshizhai* pictorial suggest a nascent correspondence between the image of the crowd and mass media. While these two examples of how the crowd was made manifest in late imperial China share little in common, I juxtapose them in order to demonstrate a further tension that is elaborated throughout this dissertation. Intellectual and political endeavors to imagine "the people" in modern China constantly collide with questions of how to reach them as an audience. Conceiving of the masses as the foundation of the modern nation and the source of revolution means not only the propagation of mass ideology, but also the creation of a *popular* culture. How the ideological sense of the crowd is made consonant with the techniques and technologies of popular, mass media, and vice versa, remains a primary issue of consideration throughout this dissertation.

"The New Ideology of Association"

The 1903 dictionary of neologisms *New Progress Toward Elegance* (Xin erya 新爾雅), compiled by two Chinese who had studied in Japan, contains a lengthy on the variations of the concept of society (*qun*). Their entry explains a wide range of terms related to social structures, from marriage and family units to ethnic and national

relationships to international and global institutions (as a single character, *qun* is glossed as "a system of collaboration between two or more people ... also referred to as *shehui*. 二人以上之協同生活體 ... 亦謂社會。").[1] The material crowd is evoked as but one of the elements of this trajectory and described as *ren wei qun* 人為群, or a "man-made assembly": "a gathering formed through human power. 以人力結成之團聚。"[2] While social relationships are in general treated as deriving from nature and based on familial, ethnic, or national alliances, the crowd is described as a fabrication, with no basis in the natural order. This suggestion implies, as described below, that the crowd is not only a product of human strength, but a modern substance able to fashioned and manipulated.

The example of *qun* as explicated in *New Progress Toward Elegance* suggests not only that a conception of the crowd distinct from the natural order, but also a disjunctive relationship between the linguistic construct of the crowd and the more general notion of the people or society. What's more, how to represent the notion of the people and define their relationship to the nation meant both redesigning the linguistic terms of collectivity, as well as developing new cultural and technological forms of expression that recognize and engage "the masses." Rebecca Karl writes how "many intellectuals ambivalently discovered in 'the people' ... the necessary grounds from and upon which to build their new visions of the nation."[3] Under the influence of contemporary Western thought and modern social and scientific theory, reform-minded intellectuals endowed *qun* with an

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[1] Wang Rongbao 汪榮寶 and Ye Lan 葉瀾. *Xin erya* 新爾雅 (New Progress Toward Elegance). Shanghai: Guoxue she, 1903. 63.

[2] Ibid., 65.

[3] Karl, Rebecca. *Staging the World: Chinese Nationalism at the Turn of the Twentieth Century*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2002. 37.

expansive meaning and transformative potential. Following repeated military and political humiliations and enduring semi-colonization at the hands of Western powers and Japan, Chinese intellectuals like Yan Fu, Kang Youwei 康有為, and his student Liang Qichao appropriated concepts of scientific evolution, social Darwinism, and parliamentary systems of government to advocate for not just a reformation of the dynastic system, but a wholesale renovation of the Chinese people and the terms used to describe them. Hao Chang's influential book on the intellectual crisis these thinkers faced characterizes the situation at the close of the nineteenth century as a consequence of the gradual loss of the "ideological hold" cosmological kingship had on the minds of intellectuals, indicating a deeper dilemma concerning the very "institutional foundation of the Chinese sociopolitical order."[4] At the heart of the ensuing debates was the nature of the relationship between the state and "the people," epitomized in the newly reconfigured notion of *qun*. For these thinkers, *qun* comprises a range of social and historical possibilities. Besides its root meaning as a crowd, *qun* furthermore became a cornerstone in the construction of a modern Chinese politics.

The prodigious translator Yan Fu was the first to introduce the concept through his essay on Darwinian evolutionary and Spencerian social theories, "Whence Strength?" (*Yuan qiang* 源強) in 1895. In this essay, *qun* is identified as a force of social bonding that has allowed Western nations to succeed and advance beyond China. In the evolutionary struggle between nations and races, Yan Fu suggests, *qun* is the key to survival. James Pusey translates the following passage: "When a *ch'ün* [*qun*], a society,

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[4] Chang, Hao. *Chinese Intellectuals in Crisis: Search for Order and Meaning (1890-1911)*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987. 6.

is formed, it is in body, function, and capability no different from the body of a living thing. ... If we know what keeps our own bodies alive, we will know what makes a *ch'ün* secure. 且一群之成，其體用功能，無異生物之一體 ... 知吾身之所生，則知群之所以立矣。”[5] Equating the competition between nations with that of species, Yan Fu's introduction of *qun* stressed the need for the creation of a Chinese "body politic" capable of using solidarity to acquire strength and power. Sociology, which, Eric Hobsbwam reminds us, was initiated in response to question of how societies cohere "when no longer held together by custom and the traditional acceptance of cosmic order ... which once justified social subordination and rule,"[6] was thus translated as *qunxue* 群學, literally "the study of groups."[7] Although this term's denotation as a scientific field of study would quickly give way to the Japanese loan word *shehuixue* 社會學,[8] Yan Fu's choice of *qun* to describe the intellectual aspiration toward a modern Chinese society illustrates the link between the physically transformative process of grouping leads the perception of the abstract idea of modern nationhood.

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[5] Yan Fu 嚴復. "Yuan qiang 源強" (Whence Strength?). *Yan Fu shiwen xuan zhu* 嚴復詩文選注 (Annotated Selections of Yan Fu's Poetry and Essays). Nanjing: Jiangsu renmin chubanshe, 1975. 25. English in Pusey, James Reeve. *China and Charles Darwin*. Cambridge: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University, 1983. 64. This analogy between the corporeal body and the the function of society would become a major theme of late Qing and Republican-era thought in China and taken up in particular by Lu Xun in his decision to pursue literature as a way to "heal" the Chinese people. Wang Hui 汪暉 makes the argument that Yan Fu's Darwinian concept of *qun* should not be conflated with the Spencerian version. While true in the semantic sense, numerous intellectuals and writers (like Lu Xun) do not make this fine distinction. See Wang Hui. *Xiandai Zhongguo sixiang de xingqi* 現代中國思想的興起 (The Rise of Modern Chinese Thought). Beijing: Sanlian shudian, 2004. 884.

[6] Hobsbawm, E.J. *The Age of Empire 1875-1914*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1987. 273.

[7] Yan Fu, "Yuan qiang," 22. Yan Fu also translated Herbert Spencer's treatise *A Study of Sociology* as *Qunxue yiyan* 群學肄言in 1902.

[8] For more on Yan Fu's techniques of translation (and transliteration), see Huang, Max K.W. "The War of Neologisms: The Competition Between the Newly Translated Terms Invented by Yan Fu and by the Japanese in the Late Qing." *China and Its Others: Knowledge Transfer Through Translation, 1829-2010*. Eds. James St. André and Peng Hsiao-yen. New York: Rodopi, 2012.

For Yan Fu, the origins of the term *qun*, even with its modern, progressive inflection, originate with the Warring States philosopher Xunzi 荀子. Xunzi writes that the human ability to form groups is not only what separates them from the beasts, but allows men to preside over them: "[Human] strength cannot match that of a bull, nor can we match a horse in speed. Yet we are able to make use of the bull and the horse. Why is this? Humans can make groups, but they cannot. 力不若牛，走不若馬，而牛馬為用，何也？曰：人能群，彼不能群也。" The classical Confucian reference is significant in that it speaks both to the degree of traditional learning that these scholars were steeped in, as well as how, in the precarious circumstances of the late Qing, it was important to sanction concepts of reform and change through classical concepts. "However revolutionary the implications," Frederic Wakeman notes, "the initial perception was only conceivable in the framework of traditional values."[9] The discourse on *qun*, therefore, should not be seen as merely the product of a Western scientific learning nor traditional Confucian thinking, but as an amalgamation of ideas fashioned under intense historical pressure. That is to say, the way that *qun* in Yan Fu and others' work functions as antecedent to the modern discourse on crowds is not merely a result of a common signifier, but in the way that an urgency of historical circumstances pushed the abstract and the practical together, producing a multiplicity of possibilities, directions, and effects.

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[9] Wakeman, Jr., Frederic E. *Telling Chinese History: A Selection of Essays*. Ed. Lea H. Wakeman. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009. 167. Wakeman also makes the important point that "study societies" (*xuehui* 學會) that proliferated in the late Qing provided a kind of model for the nation these societies' members were propagating. Kang Youwei founded the Self-Strengthening Study Society (*qiang xuehui* 強學會) in 1895, for example, on the tenants of "inspiring customs" (*kai fengqi* 開風氣), "enlightening knowledge" (*kai zhishi* 開知識), and "uniting the great mass" (*he daqun* 合大群). See 158-65. The title of this section is also drawn from Wakeman's article.

The most influential thinker and dedicated theoretician of *qun* was Liang Qichao. Directly inspired by Yan Fu's translations of Western social theory and his mentor Kang Youwei's statement that "The group is the basis and reform is the means 以群為體，以變為用,"[10] Liang's expansive notion of *qun* included a cosmological component (as the driving force of the nature of things in the universe), a moral component (as the principle that animates "humaneness" [*ren* 仁], another ancient idea reconfigured in the late Qing by Tan Sitong 譚嗣同), a scientific component (as a vehicle of Darwinian evolution), and finally, a political component. In the preface to his unfinished treatise "On Grouping" (*Shuo qun* xu 《説群》序), Liang distinguishes the "collective methods" (*qunshu* 群術) of governance (which he saw as essential to the construction of a nation) from "individualistic methods" (*dushu* 獨術) that were basically self-interested:

> [I]f one uses a collective method to rule the collective, the collective will be realized. If one uses an individualistic method to rule the collective, the collective will fail. And if one's own collective is defeated, that is to the profit of other collective. How can we then speak of individualistic [state]craft? Everyone knows that they have their own selves. They do not realize they also share the empire. ... For this reason the people are as 400 million [entities], so the country, too, will be as 400 million [entities], which means no country at all. Whoever knows how to rule well realizes that the ruler and people together make up a single person within a single collective. 以群術治群，群乃成；以獨術治群，群乃敗。己群之敗，它群之利也。何謂獨術？人人皆知有己，不知有天下。君私其府，官私其爵，農私其疇，工私其業，商私其價，身私其利，家私其肥，宗私其族，族私其姓，鄉私其土，黨私其裏，師私其教，士私其學，以故為民四萬萬，則為國亦四萬萬，夫是之謂無國。善治國者，知君之與民，同為一群之中之一人。[11]

In Liang's advocacy of the principle of *qun* we can perceive not only a radical departure from the traditional structure of kingship, but also a concept, as Xiaobing Tang puts it,

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[10] Liang quotes Kang in "*Shuo qun* xu 《説群》序" (Preface to *On Grouping*). *Yinbingshi wenji dianjiao* 飲冰室文集點校 (Collected Writings from the Ice-Drinker's Studio). Vol. 1. Kunming: Yunnan jiaoyu chubanshe, 2001. 128.

[11] Liang Qichao, "*Shuo qun* xu," 128. English in Frederic Wakeman, *Telling Chinese History*, 167. Translation modified.

"turned into a universal category that helps reveal history to be determined fundamentally by collective efforts."[12] Even more significant in terms of the discussion I embark on in this dissertation is how representation through "collective methods" engenders the collective itself.

The social construction of *qun* is, therefore, to be mobilized. Here is where Liang's thinking takes him beyond most of his contemporaries. Although there may be some innate collectivity in the cosmos or the evolutionary processes that drive human development, the crisis that China faced at the turn of the twentieth century (intensified by the failure of the 1898 Hundred Days' Reform [*wuxu bianfa* 戊戌變法] and further foreign incursion during the Boxer Rebellion [*Yihetuan yundong* 義和團運動] in 1900) provided greater impetus to "construct" the kind of healthy and cohesive society intellectuals like Liang envisioned.[13] Just before undertaking his explication of *qun*, Liang's primary concern was with the development of newspapers in China. In August of 1896 he published a short article in the inaugural issue of *Chinese Progress* (Shiwu bao 時務報) titled "On the Benefit of Newspapers on National Affairs" (Lun baoguan youyi yu guoshi 論報館有益於國事) in which he extolled the virtue of the public service provided by newspapers. Building on the analogies between body and body politic prevalent at the time, Liang compares the function of the newspaper to the eyes, ears, and voice of the public and concluding that "the more people read newspapers, the more

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[12] Tang, Xiaobing. *Global Space and the Nationalist Discourse of Modernity: The Historical Thinking of Liang Qichao*. Stanford: Stanford, California, 1996. 66.

[13] Michael Tsin points out the contradictory nature of this impulse "to emancipate and discipline the citizenry *simultaneously* for the nationalist project." See Tsin, Michael. "Imagining 'Society' in Early Twentieth-Century China." *Imagining the People: Chinese Intellectuals and the Concept of Citizenship*. Eds. Joshua A. Fogel and Peter G. Zarrow. Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, 1997. 227.

intelligent they become; the more newspapers that are established, the stronger the nation becomes. 閱報愈多者，其人愈智；報館愈多者，其國愈強。”[14] Don C. Price discovers a lexical connection between Liang’s promotion of newspapers and, just a few months later, in his championing of study societies (another crucial element in the construction of *qun*) while also noting the association he draws between *qun* and “communication” (*tong* 通), the primary merit of newspapers.[15] By encouraging communication between those in power and the general public, mass media like newspapers, in Liang’s view, perform a critical function in the development of the “imagined community” of a nation.[16] In the next section, I turn specifically to the role of fiction in Liang’s framework for the construction of *qun*.

Imagining the Masses through Fiction

Liang Qichao went so far as to identify fine art (*meishu* 美術) and, more exactly, fiction (*xiaoshuo* 小說) as the wellspring of potential social transformation. In his 1902 essay, “On the Relationship Between Fiction and the Government of the People” (*Lun xiaoshuo yu qunzhi zhi guanxi* 論小說與群治之關系), he identifies fiction and the people (*min* 民) as the twin foundations of all aspects of society and culture, arguing that any desire to change the human character (*renge* 人格) must begin with the endeavor to

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[14] Liang Qichao, “Lun baoguan youyi yu guoshi 論報館有益於國事” (On the Benefit of Newspapers on National Affairs). *Yinbingshi wenji dianjiao*, Vol. 1, 92.

[15] Price. Don C. “From Civil Society to Party Government: Models of the Citizen’s Role in the Late Qing.” *Imagining the People: Chinese Intellectuals and the Concept of Citizenship*. Eds. Joshua A. Fogel and Peter G. Zarrow. Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, 1997. 143-145.

[16] This term is of course borrowed from Benedict Anderson. See his *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. New York: Verso, 1991.

renovate fiction. He states it plainly in the opening sentence of his essay: "If one intends to renovate the people of a nation, one must first renovate its fiction. 欲新一國之民，不可不先新一國之小説。"[17] The bond between fiction and the masses is so potent that, according to Liang, "nothing can transcend the power of fiction in molding the human into more intelligent or dull-witted beings. 而导其根器使日趋于钝、日趋于利者，其力量元大于小说。"[18] What is notable in Liang's essay is the hyperbole he uses to describe both dire consequences and fantastic possibility fiction offers. David Der-wei Wang notes the rhetorical "vicious circle" initiated by Liang's overstatement: "The 'novelty' of their literary belief lies ironically in their relentless exaggeration of, rather than rejection of, the past; in their willing suspension of disbelief about the future avatars of literature, they were always the most pious advocates of the literary values they meant to attack."[19] This discursive oscillation, moreover, is not limited to fiction, but is extended in an equally equivocating posture to the figure of the masses.

Liang's method of renovating the Chinese people through fiction maintains a derisive condescension for both popular fiction and its readers. He advocates overhauling the "frivolous and immoral" (*qingbo wuxing* 輕薄無行) character of Chinese people through the implementation and dissemination of the kind of fiction that can

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[17] Liang Qichao 梁啟超. "Lun xiaoshuo yu qunzhi zhi guanxi 論小説與群治之關系." *Yinbingshi wenji dianxiao,* Vol. 2, 758. Originally published in *New Fiction* (Xin xiaoshuo, 新小説), November 14, 1902. English in Liang Qichao. "On the Relationship Between Fiction and the Government of the People." Trans. Gek Nai Cheng. *Modern Chinese Literary Thought: Writings on Literature, 1893-1945*. Ed. Kirk A. Denton. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996. 74.

[18] Liang Qichao, "Lun xiaoshuo yu qunzhi guanxi," 758. English in Liang Qichao, "On the Relationship Between Fiction and the Government of the People, 75.

[19] Wang, David Der-wei. *Fin-de-Siècle Splendor: Repressed Modernities of Late-Qing Fiction, 1849-1911*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997. 27.

provide healthy and righteous models for readers to follow.[20] C.T. Hsia notes that Liang's fantastic exaggeration of the power of fiction also presupposes "a naive reader utterly docile to persuasion."[21] Indeed, most of the essay describes the ruinous effects of unwholesome fiction. Near the end, he issues a dire warning:

> Alas! Fiction has entrapped and drowned the masses to such a deplorable extent! The thousands of words of the great sages and philosophers fail to instruct the masses. But one or two books by frivolous scholars and marketplace merchants are more than enough to destroy our entire society. The more fiction is discounted by elegant gentlemen as not worth mentioning, the more fully it will be controlled by frivolous scholars and marketplace merchants. 嗚呼！小說之陷弱人群，乃至如是， 乃至如是。大聖鴻哲數萬言諄誨之而不足者，華士坊賈一二書敗壞之而有餘，斯事即愈為大雅君子所不層道，則愈不得不專歸於華士坊賈之手。[22]

Here another Liang marks an additional target of his castigation. The inflation of the "frivolous scholar" (*huashi* 華士) and the "marketplace merchant" (*fangmai* 坊賈) suggests a desperate, self-conscious anxiety over the status of the "great sages and philosophers" (*dasheng hongzhe* 大聖鴻哲) that seek to shape society. By confronting the problem of fiction, Liang claims he is breaking with the long-standing protocol that it was beneath the attention of the "elegant gentleman" (*daya junzi* 大雅君子). Instead, he is calling for greater attention to the genre, and encouraging scholars and reformers like himself to embrace fiction and use it for principled and virtuous purposes. Yet, despite the progressive recognition of the link between popular fiction and the mobilization of

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[20] Liang Qichao, "Lun xiaoshuo yu qunzhi guanxi," 758. English in Liang Qichao, "On the Relationship Between Fiction and the Government of the People," 80.

[21] Hsia, C.T. "Yen Fu and Liang Ch'i-ch'ao as Advocates of New Fiction." *Chinese Approaches to Literature from Confucius to Liang Ch'i-ch'ao*. Ed. Adele Austin Rickett. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978. 241.

[22] Liang Qichao, "Lun xiaoshuo yu qunzhi guanxi," 760. English in Liang Qichao, "On the Relationship Between Fiction and the Government of the People, 80-81.

cultural reform, a degree of apprehension toward a changing social realm where the prescriptions of the elite are ignored is also evident.

Liang's titular designation for this notion of the governance of the collective body of Chinese citizenry, *qunzhi* 群治, is derived from his conception *qun*, the sovereign collective force that constitutes the basis of social relations as well as a modern moral consciousness. Defining the binomial neologism *qunzhi* and how to translate it has generated some notational debate. In a general sense, it refers to the governing and administration of the masses (and carries distinctly Mencian overtones),[23] but the complexity and context of Liang's thought make this term particularly protean. Cai Zongqi, responding to C.T. Hsia's own footnote-qualified translation of *qunzhi* as the "guidance of society," explains in his own lengthy footnote that Liang is referring to the

[23] Mencius (Mengzi 孟子) often uses *zhi* to denote the proper administration of a state. One example that particularly resonates with this discussion takes place in the third book of *Mencius*. Mencius tells Duke Wen of Teng (*Teng Wen gong* 滕文公), "The area of Teng is small. But there will be both gentlemen and the uncultivated there. Without the gentlemen, no one will rule over the uncultivated. Without the uncultivated, no one will support the gentlemen. 夫滕壤地褊小，將為君子焉，將為野人焉。無君子莫治野人，無野人莫養君子。" English translation in *Mengzi: With Selections from Traditional Commentaries*. Trans. Bryan W. Van Norden. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2008. 68. While James Legge translates *junzi* 君子 as "men of a superior grade" and *yeren* 野人 as "country-men," Van Norden concurs with his rendering of *zhi* as "to rule." Also see Legge, James. *The Chinese Classics Vol. II: The Works of Mencius*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1960. 243-244. Lu Xun's "On the Power of Mara Poetry," discussed below, also uses *zhi* extensively, primarily in the general sense, but at times also indicating the outmoded forms of government that were his one of his frequent targets. One example is: "Different in intention is the ideal of China's polity: 'Don't Disturb.' 中國之治，理想在不攖，而意异于前説。" See Lu Xun 魯迅. "Moluo shi li shuo 摩羅詩力説." *Lu Xun quanji* 魯迅全集 (Complete works of Lu Xun). Vol. 1. Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1981. 68. English in Lu Xun. "On the Power of Mara Poetry." Trans. Shu-ying Tsau and Donald Holoch. *Modern Chinese Literary Thought: Writings on Literature, 1893-1945*. Ed. Kirk Denton. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996. 101.

practice of *zizhi* 自治, "the self-government of the collective group."[24] Liang, according to Cai, is therefore arguing for a popular, bottom-up consciousness rather than "guidance" from above, as reflecting in his own translation, "self-government of the masses." This debate over how to translate the latter part of the title of Liang's essay demonstrates precisely the tension between the notion of the masses and the role of the intellectual that I describe in more detail in Chapter One. *Qun* is discernibly more than the static nominal of a collective social body, but also connotes an active, transformative process of social fellowship that generates both a moral consciousness as well as a popular sovereignty. The question that remains, however, is the genesis of this process: does it derive from fiction's "guidance" (which can so easily be deluded by "frivolous scholars" and "marketplace merchants"), or does it manifest itself through "self-government" (which until this point has brought the nation to the brink of doom)? Additional implications in the second element of the binomial *qunzhi* carries the implication beyond the standard definitions of *zhi* as governmental or administrative (as in *zhengzhi* 政治 or *zhili* 治理). *Zhi* also suggests the application of medicine (as in *yizhi* 醫治), a meaning that squares with the equivalence Liang draws between unhealthy, poisonous fiction, polluted air, and

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[24] Cai Zongqi. "The Rethinking of Emotion: The Transformation of Traditional Literary Criticism in the Late Qing Era." *Monumenta Serica* 45 (1997). 77-78 fn39. C.T. Hsia, "Yen Fu and Liang Ch'i-ch'ao as Advocates of New Fiction," 222 fn3. Wang Hui agrees with Cai that the notions of *qunzhi* and *zizhi* are linked, but does not go as far as Cai's claims; rather, he uses it as evidence of the inseparable notions of the individual and the collective in Liang's thought. See Wang Hui, *Xiandai Zhongguo sixiang de xingqi*, 935-951. In another footnote, Barbara Mittler points out that several of Liang's terms are anticipated in the *Shenbao* 申報 newspaper (although the example she cites for *qunzhi* appeared nearly a decade after Liang's essay). See Mittler, Barbara. *A Newspaper for China? Power Identity, and Change in Shanghai's News Media, 1872-1912*. Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2004. 110-111 fn218.

contaminated food,[25] and even punishment (as in *chuzhi* 處治). These particular resonances, as I show in Chapter One, carry special significance in the case of Lu Xun.

In sum, Liang's essay illustrates the tremendous faith placed in both fiction and the masses to transform Chinese society and culture and generate a collective commitment to the nation. In fact, the connection between fiction and the masses is more than merely sublimating; one carries with it a nearly perfect echo of the other. Both denigrated or ignored for centuries, fiction and the masses were embraced and celebrated for their shared potential to transform and revitalize Chinese society. *Xiaoshuo* operates in a remarkably similar process to that of *qun* in that each is a force of social bonding designed to repeat itself in the other. The position of the intellectual writer in this scheme, however, remains necessarily on the outside, a superfluous singularity divorced from, yet still somehow determining, the flow of this social process. The paradox here reveals Liang's reliance upon traditional Chinese categories of social organization and writing, which uphold the righteous function of the literati and the ability of literature to carry the Way (*wen yi zai dao* 文以載道). As shown in the following chapters, this dilemma's intractability and terminological slippage would be exasperated as the urgency of the calls for social and cultural revolution increased in the 1920s and writers took up their search for a voice to capture the crowd's social and historical imagination.

Picturing the New Crowd

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[25] David Der-wei Wang calls Liang's assertion that only the administration of fiction can cure previous poisoning by fiction "a strange application of the old Chinese medical concept *yi du gong du* [以毒攻毒]." See David Der-wei Wang, *Fin-de-Siècle Splendor*, 26.

The emerging discourse of the crowd in the late Qing was not limited to neologisms and literary theory, but was also made manifest in an increasing number of pictorial representations, particularly through the newly imported technologies of photography and lithography. The supplement to the Shanghai-based *Shenbao* 申報 newspaper, the *Dianshizhai Pictorial* (the title translates literally as "Studio of Touching the Stone"),[26] which ran from 1884 to the eve of the suppression of the Hundred Days' Reform in 1898, published illustrations of domestic events, world news, scientific discovery, as well as representations of scandals, spectacles, and oddities. Each illustration was accompanied with a brief explanation and commentary written in a lively classical style. Initiated by Ernest Major, who, along with three other English entrepreneurs, had established the enormously successful *Shenbao* in 1872, *Dianshizhai* was an unabashedly popular form of print media intended for mass consumption.[27] Major introduced the mass technology of lithography to China around 1876 when he founded the Tien Shih Chai Photolithographic Printing Company, and was inspired to publish a newspaper pictorial supplement following his company's print run of woodblock prints by prominent Chinese artists, including Wu Youru 吳友如, who

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[26] Don J. Cohn points out the double-meaning of the phrase, which refers to the lithographic printing process and alludes to the phrase *dianshi chengjin* 點石成金, or "touching the stone and turning it to gold," meaning to improve on the quality of a written composition. Cohn, Don J. *Vignettes from the Chinese: Lithographs from Shanghai in the Late Nineteenth Century*. Hong Kong: The Chinese University of Hong Kong Press, 1987. 1 fn1.

[27] Rudolf G. Wagner provides a detailed history of the *Dianshizhai* enterprise. See Wagner, Rudolf G. "Joining the Global Imaginaire: The Shanghai Illustrated Newspaper *Dianshizhai huabao*." *Joining the Global Public: Word, Image, and City in Early Chinese Newspapers, 1870-1910*. Ed. Rudolf G. Wagner. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007. 105-174.

became a principal illustrator for *Dianshizhai* until the mid-1890s.[28] The success of *Dianshizhai* was predicated on its popular appeal; Major proclaimed in the first advertisement for the supplement that "I have asked people with a fine skill for drawing situations to pick sensational and entertaining scenes and draw illustrations of them. 爰倩精於繪事者，擇新奇可喜之事，摹而為圖。"[29] Given this mission, *Dianshizhai* became not only one of the finest examples of an early mass culture in China, but a prime disseminator of the crowd image in the late nineteenth century.

The number of illustrations published on the pages of the *Dianshizhai* over the dozen or so years of its publication numbers more than 4500, covering an extensive and fascinating range of topics.[30] In the terms of this dissertation, what the *Dianshizhai* offers is an expansive look at the the image and conception of the Chinese crowd. At roughly the same time that high-minded intellectuals like Yan Fu and Liang Qichao were expounding upon the social and political implications of *qun*, the *Dianshizhai* was giving its readers a very different picture of this principle of "grouping." Crowds are the primary focus of many of these illustrations, such as those depicting battle scenes, large-scale meetings of governmental and social associations, festival celebrations, funeral processions, gang fights, and even protests (the 1895 protest led by Kang Youwei

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[28] Ye Xiaoqing. *The* Dianshizhai Pictorial*: Shanghai Urban Life, 1884-1898*. Ann Arbor: Center for Chinese Studies, The University of Michigan, 2003. 4-5. For a brief history on the development of lithography in nineteenth-century China, See Reed, Christopher. "Re/Collecting the Sources: Shanghai's *Dianshizhai Pictorial* and Its Place in Historical Memories, 1884-1949." *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture* 12:2 (Fall 2000). 48-51.

[29] Transcribed and punctuated in A Ying 阿英. *Wan Qing wenyi baokan shulüe* 晚清文藝報刊述略 (Chronicle of Late-Qing Literature and Art Periodicals). Shanghai: Gudian wenxue chubanshe, 1958. 99-100. English in Rudolf G. Wagner, "Joining the Global Imaginaire," 134.

[30] Ye Xiaoqing's book does an excellent job of classifying, translating, and providing context for the illustrations.

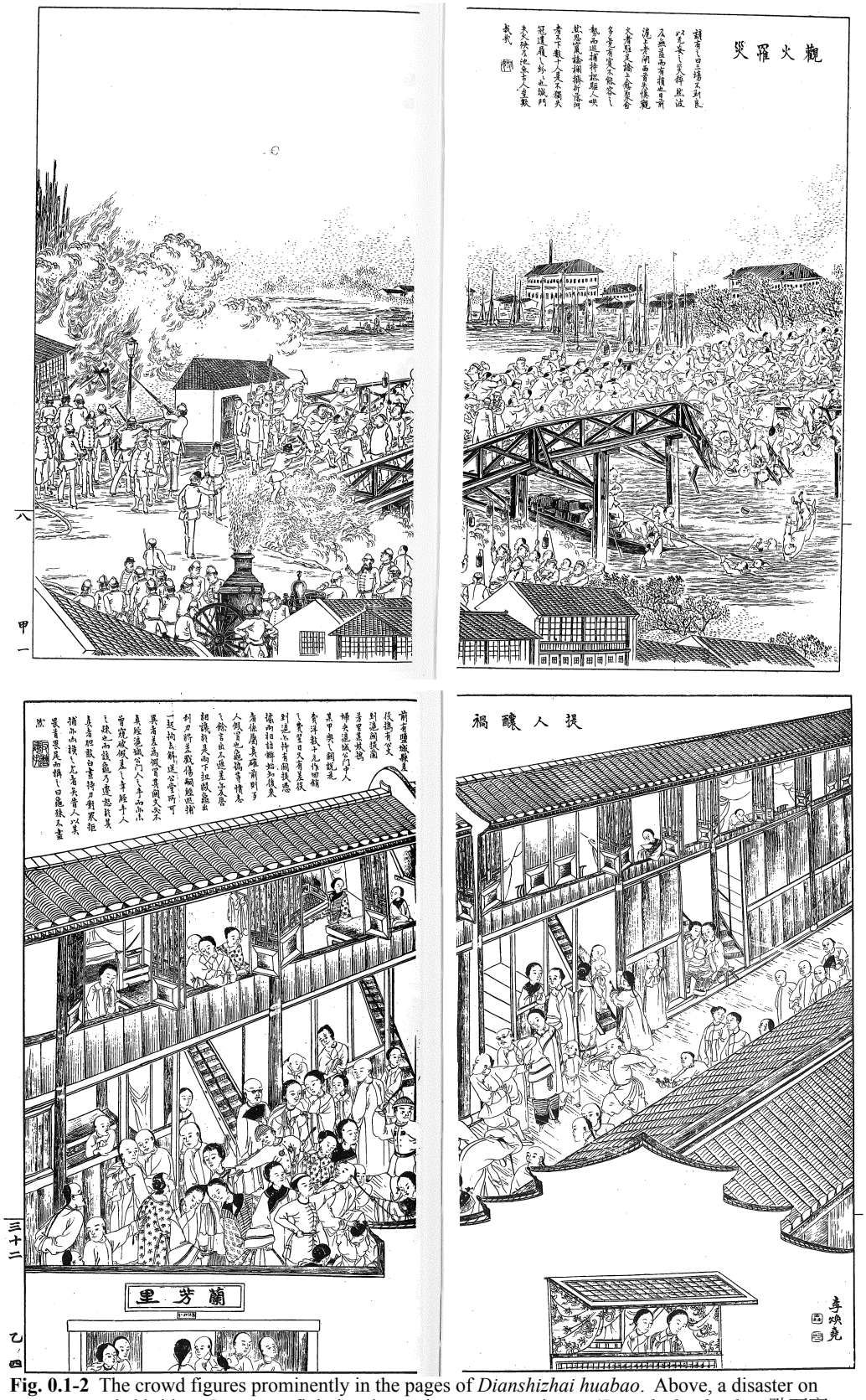

Fig. 0.1-2 The crowd figures prominently in the pages of *Dianshizhai huabao*. Above, a disaster on an overcrowded bridge. Bottom, a fight breaks out in a courtesan house (*Dianshizhai huabao* 點石齋畫報. Hong Kong: Guangjiaojing chubanshe, 1983.).

petitioning the unequal Treaty of Shimonoseki [*Maguan tiaoyue* 馬關條約] in Beijing, for example). In this type of illustration, while the crowd definitely possesses a degree of social presence, their depiction is usually quite heterogenous and haphazard. That is, while the number of those amassed in the frame can reach in the hundreds, the emphasis is on the chaotic spectacle they create, rather than any sense of solidarity or union. In most examples, each figure is individuated and clearly defined (in stark contradistinction to the propaganda images of the 1930s woodcut art or posters from the Cultural Revolution, discussed in Chapter Three). This kind of image projects a crowd in a theatrical sense; in the burgeoning urban spaces of Shanghai, the streets themselves become a stage that the crowd ascends.

Fig. 0.3 Rather than depict the action on the stage directly, the audience itself is the focus of this *Dianshizhai* illustration (*Dianshizhai huabao* 點石齋畫報. Guangzhou: Guangzhou renmin chubanshe, 1983.).

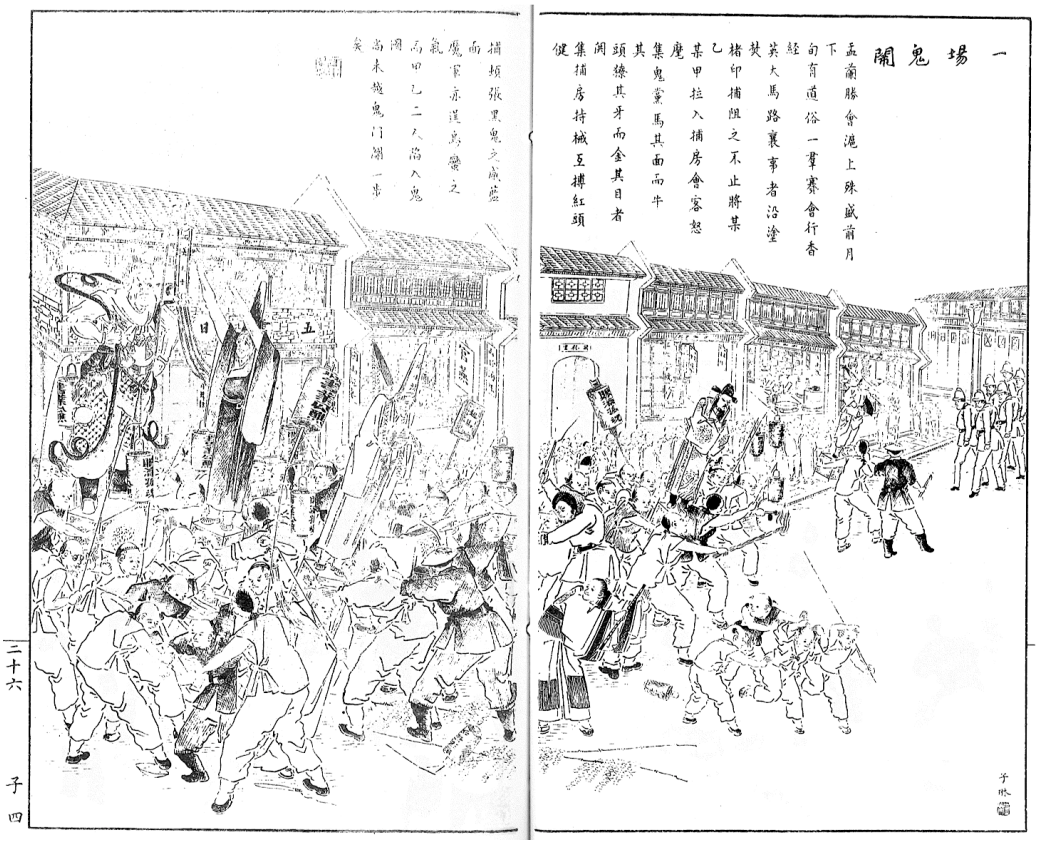

Fig. 0.4 A fight ensues as a Ghost Festival procession passes through the British settlement (*Dianshizhai huabao* 點石齋畫報. Guangzhou: Guangzhou renmin chubanshe, 1983.).

In contrast to this type of crowd, another, even more pervasive crowd takes shape on the pages of the *Dianshizhai*. While the crowd embodies a new, exciting, and dangerous sense of urban congregation that, as implied in the theatrical metaphor used above to describe the image of the crowd in pandemonium, provides a fantastic visual spectacular, it also implies the presence of an abundant and profuse audience to witness it. Spectators of some sort crowd the edges of nearly every *Dianshizhai* illustration. For the most part, their gaze is concentrated on the ostensible subject of the picture, even if the display is a crowd itself. Some individuals, however, seem distracted by the other watchers, or by something else entirely (the numerous illustrations of brothel scenes contain what appear to be different vignettes entirely happening in the vicinity of the

main show). Theater or performance depictions meticulously show individual reactions and expressions among the audience members, and often members of the peripheral audience are in the process of whispering comments to the person next to them (these editorial remarks often make their way into the commentary included in the empty space above the picture).

I draw attention to these tangential crowds or clusters of the intradiegetic spectators for two reasons. First, they compose a pivotal element within the scene in the way that they testify to the main action's spectacularity. Their gaze mimics our own, and the way they treat the subject matter, — enthralled, terrified, ridiculous, or deplorable — is assumed to imitate our own. They legitimize not just the object that draws their attention, but the act of looking itself. In this way, they serve as a kind of model, training our gaze toward the unfolding spectacle as well as to the practice using images to mediate our experiences. In other words, we see what they see already *as spectacle*. Second, these seemingly marginal figures mark the crowd as an object of visual contemplation. In Chapter Three, I make the argument that crowd figures in propaganda film and woodcut act beyond their capacities as image and serve, like the modern technology that transmits it, as a medium that reproduces crowds outside the frame. In the *Dianshizhai*, the viewing crowds that populate the edges of the frame portend something similar. Through the act of their witness, they become part of the technology that produces the image and implicate us, as well, in this spectacular dynamic.

Neither Liang Qichao's notion of *qun* nor the crowds shown in *Dianshizhai* are crowds in the same sense as those I explore in the following four chapters. Rather, what

these examples show is a building anxiety around the idea of the crowd and how it should be represented. "[I]f the early modern state, its functionaries, and its theoreticians were concerned with the chaotic potential of individuals when they came together as masses," writes William Egginton, then the concerns of later political theorists "is with the possibility of crowds acting nonchaotically, as a unified force."[31] In other words, if Liang Qichao holds up fiction (or if the *Dianshizhai* advances the mass pictorial) as a kind of crowd control — creating models for an ideal reading and viewing public — then the works of literature and art I examine over the course of the this dissertation, while borrowing from these models, are also haunted by them. In Liang's case, the intellectual elitism that conceives of (and simultaneously reprimands) *qun* is a stigma carried by countless cases of those persecuted, imprisoned, and silenced in the name of the masses over the course of twentieth-century China. As for *Dianshizhai*, the visual dynamic between spectator and spectacle, articulated by Lu Xun in the May Fourth era, heightened in woodcut art of the 1930s, and totalized in the posters of the Cultural Revolution — a totalization of gazes — returns as commercial (and national) product in the films of Zhang Yimou at the turn of the twenty-first century.

Finally, my brief reading of Liang Qichao alongside *Dianshizhai* is indicative of what Leo Ou-fan Lee and Andrew Nathan call the "dual legacy" in the development of mass culture in modern China.[32] On one hand, they write, is "the more serious ideology of popular culture, which sought to redefine the nation in terms of the 'people,' to carry

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[31] Egginton, William. "Intimacy and Anonymity, or How the Audience Became a Crowd." *Crowds*. Eds Jeffrey T. Schnapp and Matthew Tiews. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006. 97.

[32] Lee, Leo Ou-fan and Andrew J. Nathan. "The Beginnings of Mass Culture: Journalism and Fiction in the Late Ch'ing and Beyond." *Popular Culture in Late Imperial China*. Eds. David Johnson, Andrew J. Nathan, and Evelyn S. Rawski. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985. 388.

out mass education, and to uplift the people through culture sponsored from above," while the other legacy views popular culture as primarily "diversionary and escapist enjoyment."[33] These two approaches to mass culture, often intertwined in form and content, also share the common, driving factor of technological development. This dissertation primarily deals with the former legacy that, like Liang Qichao, seeks to refashion and mold the people through familiar, even popular forms in order to transform them into ideal citizens. However, in the efforts to popularize the "correct" kind of fiction, or to disseminate transformative images of revolution, the demarcation between these two types grows increasingly difficult to distinguish. These tensions between the ideological and the commercial culminate in my final chapter on filmmaker Zhang Yimou, whose career is marked with such gestures to the masses on and off the screen.

Dissertation Structure

The first two chapters of this dissertation discuss the figure of the crowd in literature and literary discourse, while the second two explore the issue in image and film. This division, while not intended to suggest the disappearance of the crowd in later fiction, does suggest a kind of "visual turn" over the course of the twentieth century in China. I hope to draw attention to the ways that the figure of the crowd operates at both a literal and visual level, often simultaneously. The most famous example of this conflation is of course Lu Xun's recollection of his experience the lantern slide in which his gaze is drawn to the crowd that surrounds the victim of summary execution. While

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[33] Ibid.

this encounter with what Rey Chow calls "technologized visuality"[34] is the catalyst for his literary undertaking, it also introduces the key dynamic of spectacularity and the crowd, which I read heavily into the propaganda posters of the Cultural Revolution and the films of Zhang Yimou. In the larger project of which this dissertation is a part of, I plan to complicate this rudimentary structure of the literary and the visual further by including discussions of Maoist-era literature (by authors such as Lu Ling 路翎 and Zhao Shuli 趙樹理), as well as contemporary fiction (such as Gao Xingjian's *One Man's Bible* [Yi ge ren de shengjing 一個人的聖經] and Yu Hua's *Brothers* [Xiongdi 兄弟]). For the time being, however, the two halves of this dissertation may be seen as a kind of balanced, but complimentary approach to reading the figure of the crowd in modern China.

Chapter One follows up on the emerging themes presented in this introduction through a close analysis of the dynamic of the crowd in Lu Xun and Qu Qiubai. Primarily, this chapter investigates the role of the crowd in the self-construction of the modern intellectual. Much has been written on this basic contradiction between the elite intellectual and the Chinese masses, but I believe that by focusing on the two themes of the public warning (*shizhong* 示眾) in the case of Lu Xun and the idea of superfluity (*duoyu* 多餘) in Qu Qiubai, we can better understand both the historical demands placed on the writer to create the crowd (as a basis for revolutionary activity) and the simultaneous anxiety over granting historical, and historiographical, authority to the crowd. I argue that these authors' literary subject positions that lead them not only to

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[34] Chow, Rey. *Primitive Passions; Visuality, Sexuality, Ethnography, and Contemporary Chinese Cinema*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1995. 4-11.

explore the notion of the crowd as a site of modern contradiction, but also pushed their self-introspection to the limits, precipitating an interrogation of the social efficacy of literature itself.

The keyword for Chapter Two is "massification" (*dazhonghua* 大眾化). In this chapter I consider this term both a key theoretical event in the development of modern Chinese literature as well as a narrative technique of writing the crowd into being. The three authors discussed in this chapter, Wang Jingzhi 汪靜之, Zhang Tianyi 張天翼, and Wu Zuxiang 吳組緗, however, each explore in different ways the crowd's latent instability and often volatile means of manifestation. This violent undercurrent in crowd formation is made manifest in its constant threat of its violence, dissolution, or disappearance; "massification" from this perspective can refer to both the masses these works are attempting to foment, and a rhetoric of widespread massacre. I contend that these visions of excess constitute a dialectic of what Elaine Scarry calls "problematically abstract" and the "problematically concrete," as the grammar of the crowd points both toward its immanent presence and its haunting absence.[35] In this way, these gruesome portrayals of the crowd speak to both the (over)materiality of history's grisly returns as well the impossibility of rehabilitating history, through representation, into a cohesive unity.

Chapter Three begins my inquiry into the relationship between the crowd and the image. I examine two films, *Big Road* (Dalu 大路) from the 1930s and *Prairie Fire* (Liaoyuan 燎原) from the 1960s, and provide a brief genealogy of the crowd image in

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[35] Scarry, Elaine. *Resisting Representation*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994. 3.

propaganda art, likewise beginning with the 1930s and concluding in the 1960s. In developing a methodology for the study of the depiction of the crowd in such technologically-reproduced images, I rethink Siegfried Kracauer's notion of the "mass ornament." Generally thought of as nationalist expression of homogeneity and totalization, the portrayal of the masses in these films and posters constitute, for me, transmit not just the crowd's sublime unity, but also the very means of its reproduction as image. The crowd serves as more than accessory to power, but a powerful medium that extends to the collective reception of these works.

I conclude this dissertation with an overview of the career of Zhang Yimou. From Zhang's early work as cinematographer for the Fifth Generation classics and throughout his highly successful directorial career, Zhang's continuous fascination with the crowd image suggests a keen awareness of the possibilities and contradictions of collective representation, especially in the interplay between spectator and spectacle. Chosen to direct the Opening Ceremonies of the much-anticipated 2008 Olympics in Beijing, his massive deployment of "human wave tactics" wowed the world and evoked memories of the crowd image prevalent during the Cultural Revolution. Positioning Zhang Yimou's use of the crowd within the context of this "red legacy" of revolutionary history, technological visuality, and the post-socialist commercial film industry, this chapter argues that the persistence of the crowd image proves that efforts to define the Chinese masses remain an ongoing concern. In a brief coda, I use Feng Xiaogang's 馮小剛 recent film *Aftershock* (Tangshan da dizhen 唐山大地震, 2010) and its use of images of

multiplicity as a way to counter the overwhelming spectacle of Zhang's tactics with a expression of collective mourning and loss.

CHAPTER ONE
THE CROWD AND THE SUPERFLUOUS: IMAGINING THE MASSES IN LU XUN AND QU QIUBAI

Introduction: Figuring the Crowd

The role played by intellectuals in the invention the Chinese masses constitutes a key point of entry into the imagination and representation of the crowd in fiction and literature. In depicting the masses as a progressive social force of enlightened collectivity, while simultaneously speaking on their behalf as a self-appointed arbiter of historical transformation, the intellectual assumes the contradictory position of simultaneously standing above the crowd and participating in its constitution. The paradoxical posture apparent here figures prominently in not just the rhetorical and literary techniques used to reveal the crowd as the vehicle for national salvation, but also in the self-construction of the intellectual and fashioning of the writer's social role. Pivotal as the intellectual is to the discursive formation and vitality of the crowd, the very act of representation exposes his own material and historical irrelevance. This contradiction and its implications, foundational to the imagination of the crowd in modern China, is the main focus of this chapter.

From the perspective briefly outlined above, the crowd is regarded as more than a socio-historiographical or ideological notion, but a literary figure as well. With the term figure, I want to distinguish this analysis from other studies on "crowd theory" or "crowd psychology." Although these works are a valuable source for my investigation, with the term figure I hope to push my study in a somewhat different direction. The crowd and its

representations were elements of an emerging discourse of masses in the first decades of the twentieth century in China. The images of the crowd produced effects felt across a wide range of cultural productions, and provoked a renovation of literature and literary theory. The figure of the crowd in literature sustains the primary contradiction mentioned above and invokes some of the principle dilemmas found in the act of literary representation itself. Haun Saussy notes how "Media such as written language cannot express the crowd directly, but only fashion devices for showing it."[1] Saussy's point, related to how crowds are represented in early Chinese historical texts, likens the narratological function of the crowd to that of a "medium," an indeterminate body without agency, but upon which agents act.[2] The notion of the crowd as medium may be expanded in my formulation: an ideological tool whose image is wielded by those in power, certainly, but also as an intermediary between the present and an understanding of history. The term *medium* also carries an undercurrent of the necromantic sense that acts as a channel to an unseen, spectral force that the crowd summons into being.

This figural approach, therefore, reads the crowd through multiple, often contradictory, layers of cultural and literary significance. In the works of Lu Xun 魯迅 and Qu Qiubai 瞿秋白, discussed below, the presence of the crowd is discerned even when not overtly depicted, whether as subjective aspiration, antagonistic foil, or haunting presence. What's more, as Ian Munro notes in his study on the staging of the crowd of early modern London, "Figuration always involves a process of displacement, a

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[1] Saussy, Haun. "Crowds, Number, and Mass in China." *Crowds*. Eds. Jeffery T. Schnapp and Matthew Tiews. Stanford: Stanford University Press. 2006. 252.

[2] Ibid., 251.

refracting through a variety of cultural filters" that renders the division between the world of the text and reality "explicitly permeable."[3] As writers and intellectuals of the first decades of twentieth-century China sought to enlist the masses in their project of cultural renovation and social change — the challenge of writing *of* the masses and *for* them as well — they were also engaged with a host of related notions, such as linguistic register, literary style, popular appeal, and, most relevant to this chapter, the role of the writer in modern society.

Functioning both as a literary trope and point of critical inquiry, figures of the crowd became a major site of contestation and negotiation in Chinese literary circles of the 1920s and 1930s, at the intersection between a changing sense of literature's social function and the role of intellectuals and writers in mobilizing cultural reform. However, rather than take the masses as a given, preexisting aesthetic or cultural category, I want to focus on the invention of the crowd in the literary discourse. How did the crowd obtain its cultural and symbolic capital? What role did writers and authors have in creating the crowd as a site for the dispute of literary values? And how did writers figure their own role vis-à-vis the crowd? Using these broad questions as preliminary inquiry, the scope of my discussion of the crowd narrows as I examine the rhetorical use of the crowd in two enormously significant figures of modern Chinese literature and literary politics, Lu Xun and Qu Qiubai. My choice of these two authors presents several challenges in the way that neither, despite their sophisticated ideological and theoretical viewpoints, use the crowd in their writings in a strictly reductive or completely progressivist sense.

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[3] Munro, Ian. *The Figure of the Crowd in Early Modern London: The City and Its Double*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005. 2-3.

Instead, each author sees the crowd as a site of both latent and manifest problems, particularly in their use of the crowd as a way to figure their own relationship to the social and ethical matrix of literary production in the rapidly changing China of the 1920s and 30s.

Thus, the examples of Lu Xun and Qu Qiubai may help us to better understand both the historical demands placed on the writer to create the crowd (as a basis for revolutionary activity) and the simultaneous anxiety over granting historical, and historiographical, authority to the crowd, as well as those high-minded authors who claim to speak unimpeded on its behalf. Marston Anderson writes on the authorial awareness of these "limits of realism" sparked by a change in the dynamic between writer and the collective: "From the start realists recognized certain limitations to this new authorial ego – both in its relationship with the audience, the 'you' to whom a fictional work is addressed, and in its power to benefit the disenfranchised 'others,' the 'they' whom the new fiction had introduced for the first time into the field of fictional representation."[4] The demands for "literary massification" (*wenxue dazhonghua* 文學大眾化) in the 1930s would culminate in the early 1940s with Mao's official insistence on the erasure of individual authorial subjectivity and replacing it with that of the collective.

Seen from this perspective, the role of the intellectual writer in revolutionary history, as well as the subjective writing process itself, comes into question. Lu Xun and Qu Qiubai are singled out therefore because of the ways they undermine our received notions of the evolution of modern Chinese literature. In spite their philosophical (and

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[4] Anderson, Marston. *The Limits of Realism: Chinese Fiction in the Revolutionary Period*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990. 201.

often literary) convictions that place masses at the vanguard of cultural transformation, each fails to overcome his own intellectual position and truly integrate himself into the crowd. Instead, their writings reveal a more ambivalent posture of hesitation, or even failure, to join with the masses. I am not contending that this failure was merely the consequence of an intellectual elitism, or even that "failure" represents a discreet lack on the part of the authors. Instead, I argue that it was rather their *literary* subject positions that led them not only to confront the notion of the crowd as a site of modern contradiction, but also pushed their self-introspection to the limits of the efficacy of literary exchange with the crowd. Both Lu Xun and Qu Qiubai grappled with these questions in very personal ways, each maintaining a tenuous grasp of reserved and intimate subjectivity while at the same time writing and theorizing the revolutionary, collective role of literature that takes the crowd as a foundational motif.

The leitmotif of the *shizhong* 示眾, or public warning, in Lu Xun's fiction serves as my point of entry into his conceptualization of the crowd. Appearing repeatedly in his work, investigating Lu Xun's fictional stagings of *shizhong* provides not just insight into his perspective on the masses and their representation, but is also constituent of that against which he is defining himself as a writer and intellectual. In the way that it complicates its ostensible subject and object, the *shizhong* becomes more than a symbolic analogy in Lu Xun's indictment of Chinese society, but demonstrates a particular point of the modern Chinese writer's dilemma. In the case of Qu Qiubai, I explore his notion of the superfluous and its implications in his work. Despite Qu's deep involvement in Communist politics, including a brief (and somewhat disastrous) stint as CCP leader, it

was his enthusiasm for literary politics and writing that fueled his devotion to the revolutionary cause. For Qu, being superfluous was an impediment to be overcome on the path to mobilizing the revolutionary masses, and yet he ultimately finds a certain lasting value in superfluity, determined primarily through his literary subjectivity. What's more, while these two writers' respective visions of revolution seem at odds,[5] the personal relationship they forged in Shanghai in the early 1930s opens up another dimension of the possibilities of fellowship that literature offers.

The Mara Poet and the Crowd

In the Introduction, I outlined the role of the concept of *qun* in the reformist thought of late Qing intellectuals such as Yan Fu and Liang Qichao. Their endorsement of science, nationalism, and other aspects of modern Western thought emphasized the necessity for a psychological transformation of the Chinese people, which would consequently engender the conditions for the development of a cultivated, enlightened culture. The overriding belief in the determining power of culture that characterizes the development of modern intellectual thought, according to Liu Kang, "represents a Chinese attempt to address the problems of modernity," and should not be viewed as a historical anomaly or impediment.[6] This focus on culture and how the masses understand and receive it prioritized, and politicized, the revolutionary potential of certain products of cultural activity. This section commences a discussion of Lu Xun's early essay "On

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[5] Liu Kang writes that "the incommensurability between Lu Xun and Qu Qiubai signals the bifurcation of Chinese Marxist cultural and aesthetic theories in the decades that followed, thereby intensifying the tensions within Chinese modernity." See Liu Kang. *Aesthetics and Marxism:Chinese Aesthetic Marxists and Their Western Contemporaries*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2000. 7.

[6] Liu Kang, *Aesthetics and Marxism,* 13.

the Power of Mara Poetry" (*Moluo shi li shuo* 魔羅詩力説) written in 1908 in order to place the development of Lu Xun's imagination of the crowd in context.

Six years after Liang Qichao's impassioned call for the renovation of the people through fiction, Lu Xun conjured another image of the relationship between the writer and the masses in his 1908 essay "On the Power of Mara Poetry." On the surface, Lu Xun's treatise shares many similarities with Liang Qichao's seminal essay "On the Relationship Between Fiction and the Government of the People," discussed above. Both look toward literature as a means to national and cultural salvation, and both advocate a social function for literature that enlightens the masses and rouses them into action. Lu Xun and Liang Qichao also share a despondent view of China's predicament at the beginning of the twentieth century and are imbued with the sense of crisis. Each of these essays, in this sense, are intended to serve not just as pronouncements on literary theory, but exhortations to cultural and national transformation. Despite these superficial resemblances, the two essays diverge significantly on the issue of the role of the writer and image of the masses that develops in relation to him.

For Lu Xun, the function of a writer (specifically, a poet) is to disturb the stagnant conventions of an era and rejuvenates the people and their culture. Invoking the demonic forces of Mara, the Hindu god of destruction, along with Satan, Prometheus, and others, Lu Xun assembles a terrible and insurgent school of cultural renegades who wield a sublime, revitalizing power. The poets he groups under this epithet, such as Byron, Shelly, Mickiewicz, Pushkin, Petöfi, and other writers of the Romantic era, did not limit themselves to composing verse, but often took up arms and shed their blood for

nationalist causes. Among these poet-warriors, writes Lu Xun, "few would create conformist harmonies, but they'd bellow an audience to its knees, these iconoclasts whose spirit struck deep chords in later generations, extending to infinity. 大都不為順世和樂之音，動吭一呼，聞者興起，爭天拒俗，而精神复深感后世人心，綿延至于無已。"[7] These heroes share a certain "extremely great voice" (*zhida zhi sheng* 至大之聲) that is at once individual and rebellious, primeval and collective.[8] The singular voice of the Mara poet becomes a beacon for the people who hear its galvanizing call; it metonymically signals the totality of the whole, transforming the barren, "desolate" (*xiaotiao* 蕭條) cultural landscape from silence to a roar.[9]

Lu Xun's exultation of the Mara poet in this essay ostensibly celebrates the writer as, in Leo Ou-fan Lee's words, "a lone genius, an unabashed individualist, a rebel against social convention."[10] Lu Xun notes in the concluding section of his essay the characteristics that unite this diverse group: "each was a vigorous, unflinching defender of truth; none turned conformist to please the crowd; they spoke with strength to stir new life in their countrymen and make their country a great one. 無不剛健不撓，抱誠守真；不取媚于群，以隨順舊俗；發為雄聲，以起其國人之新生，而大其國于天下。"[11] However, in contrast to this reading, there is another possibility present in "On the Power of Mara Poetry" that locates the writer's regenerative voice in dialectical

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[7] Lu Xun, "Moluo shi li shuo," 66. English in Lu Xun, "On the Power of Mara Poetry," 99.

[8] Lu Xun, "Moluo shi li shuo," 63. English translation is from Wang, Ban. *The Sublime Figure of History: Aesthetics and Politics in Twentieth-Century China*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997. 61.

[9] Lu Xun, "Moluo shi li shuo," 63. English in Lu Xun, "On the Power of Mara Poetry," 96.

[10] Lee, Leo Ou-fan. *Voices from the Iron House: A Study of Lu Xun*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987. 21-22.

[11] Lu Xun, "Moluo shi li shuo," 99. English in Lu Xun, "On the Power of Mara Poetry," 99.

relation to the crowd. As in Liang Qichao's formulation in "On the Relationship Between Fiction and the Government of the People," Lu Xun theorizes the function of the author in relation to the effects produced by the author's writing on society. Whereas Liang's essay proposes what is essentially a popular, even modern, fiction that can shape the people's conception of themselves in the world, Lu Xun's vision is much more radical. Rather than manipulate people's thinking, Lu Xun's Mara poet overwhelms his audience in a tenor resonating from the depths of a primordial, collective memory.

The sublime experience he details is as much physical as emotional. Ban Wang discusses the "body image" that Lu Xun constructs in his essay in terms that evoke the extreme individualism of the Nietzschean superman, yet also remarks that Lu Xun "hoped that the augmented and empowered image may come back to us, gigantic with new meaning and value, capable of revitalizing and fortifying us with the sublime force of rivers and mountains."[12] The Mara poet, therefore, cannot stimulate the audience's potential for transformation without re-imagining it in terms of a unified whole:

> Poets are they who disturb people's minds. Every mind harbors poetry; the poet makes the poem, but it is not his alone, for once it is read the mind will grasp it: everyone harbors the poet's poem. … The poet gives it words, puts pick to strings, mental chords respond, his voice pervades the soul, and all things animate raise their heads as though witness to dawn, giving scope to its beauty, force, and nobility, and it must thereby breach the stagnant peace. Breach of peace furthers all humanity. 蓋詩人者，攖人心者也. 凡人之心，無不有，如詩人作詩，詩不為詩人獨有，凡一讀其詩，心即會解者，即無不自有詩人之詩. 詩人為之語，則握撥一彈，心弦立應，其聲於澈靈府，令有情皆舉其首，如睹曉日，益為之美，偉強力高發揚，而污濁之平和，以之將破. 平和之破，人道蒸也.[13]

In Lu Xun's view, the individual poet's organic intuition of the people's innate desire for transformation and his ability to intone the embodied spirit of rejuvenation is the very thing that conjures "the people" as such. Ban Wang further observes that the

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[12] Ban Wang, *The Sublime Figure of History*, 69.

[13] Lu Xun, "Moluo shi li shuo," 68. English in Lu Xun, "On the Power of Mara Poetry," 102.

oversimplified distinction between the individual and the collective cannot be sustained in rigorous analysis of this essay, or Lu Xun in a more general sense; rather, our inquiry should be "directed more to how the individual is articulated or enmeshed *with* the collective" (emphasis added).[14] The question is not merely one of positing a connection between the singular and the whole (locating the individual *within* the collective), but how the voice of the singular writer operates only in relation to its collective resonance, and vice versa (each is articulated *with* the other). The enthralling correspondence between the superhuman voice of the poet and the sublimated crowd that Lu Xun envisions in this early essay would be, of course, impossible to achieve. The longing he articulates so passionately here would, on the contrary, comprise perhaps the primary conundrum of his literary career, and his ambivalence and antagonism toward the crowd would, as I show below, intensify.

One further contradiction in the image of the masses that Lu Xun depicts in "On the Power of Mara Poetry" deserves brief discussion. In this dissertation's Introduction, I argue that the attention given to and the anxiety over the representation of the crowd is a characteristic of modernity. Despite the despondency and trepidation Liang Qichao harbors toward the reading public in his essay, he nevertheless places the onus of reform and modernization squarely onto his notion of "the people" and image of the crowd. For his part, Lu Xun shares with Liang a vision of modernity contingent on an enlightened populace, yet differs significantly in the conviction that the collective is a modern phenomenon. On one hand, the source of Mara poetry's power to unsettle stagnant and

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[14] Ban Wang, *The Sublime Figure of History*, 65.

oppressive cultural traditions is a collective unity long since fragmented, a vigor of a lost and forgotten spirit. The "desolation" (*xiaotiao*) he surveys in China in this sense does more than describe its cold, silent, and barren cultural landscape of the present age, but imagines it in terms of temporality as ruins:

> When the culture declined, the fate of the race was sealed, the populace stilled, the glory dimmed; the desolate mood of those who read history flares as this record of civilization inches toward the final page. So it goes with them all, famous at the brink of history, who fashioned the dawn of culture and are now shadow nations. 遞文事式微，則種人之運命亦盡，群生輟響，榮華收光；讀史者蕭條之感，即以怒起，而此文明史記，亦漸臨末頁矣。凡負令譽於史初，開文化之曙色，而今日轉為影國者，無不如斯。使舉國人所習聞，最適莫如天竺。[15]

The poet's mission, from this perspective, is less about locating a voice that serves strictly modern purpose, but recovering an ancient, primordial bellow that can unify the people once more. This forgotten quality of the crowd, the "voice of the soul" (*xinsheng* 心聲) is what is stirred by Mara poetry.

On the other hand, this temporal figuration also suggests an image of the crowd not only primitive in nature, but barbaric in behavior. The path from the primal, destructive forces awakened by the Mara poet to the collective undertaking of national rejuvenation threatens at every point to veer toward bloodthirsty, savage violence. Regarding the Mara poet's inclination toward war and self-sacrifice, he remarks,

> Most took up arms and shed their blood, like swordsman who circle in public view, causing shudders of pleasure at the sight of mortal combat. To lack men who shed their blood in public is a disaster for the people; yet having them and ignoring them, even proceeding to kill them, is a greater disaster from which the people cannot recover. 大都執兵流血，如角劍之士，轉輾于眾之目前，使抱戰栗与愉快而觀其鏖扑。故無流血于眾之目前者，其群禍矣；雖有而眾不之視，或且進而殺之，斯其為群，乃愈益禍而不可救也！

Lu Xun posits a pleasure gained by the audience during the spectacle of public violence and even upholds it as a positive social force, yet also claims in the same sentence that the spectator crowd's engagement in such violence is an irrevocable catastrophe. Near

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[15] Lu Xun, "Moluo shi li shuo," 63. English in Lu Xun, "On the Power of Mara Poetry," 97.

the end of the essay, Lu Xun wonders why China lacks such powerful poetic voices, and places the blame on the very crowd that is to be illuminated, speculating that China's warrior-poet remains "unborn perhaps, or murdered by the public, or both -- thus China has become desolate. 非彼不生，即生而賊于眾，居其一或兼其二，則中國遂以蕭條。" As I show below, this view of the individual writer persecuted and martyred by the crowd prefigures much of his later May Fourth-era work and characterizes his ambivalent relationship with the crowd.

The Intellectual and the Crowd: Lu Xun and Qu Qiubai

In the early decades of the twentieth century, the ways in which Chinese writers were, like Liang Qichao and Lu Xun, imagining the masses constitute an engagement with the urgent circumstances surrounding manifold social, political, and cultural crises. The endeavors of fashioning the image of an enlightened collective while simultaneously creating their own "new self-image of importance" were necessarily intertwined tasks within the revolutionary discourse, and situate the intellectual in the contradictory position of at once writing the crowd into being while asserting difference from it.[16] Kirk Denton writes on the attempts of late Qing intellectuals, including Liang and Lu Xun, to antagonize the neo-Confucian tradition predicated on a "mutuality" between the self and the world through the promotion of evolutionary materialism and romantic idealism, the logic of which "led to a split between inner self and outer world that could not sustain

[16] Lee, Leo Ou-Fan and Merle Goldman. "Introduction: The Intellectual History of Modern China." *An Intellectual History of Modern China*. Eds. Merle Goldman and Leo Ou-Fan Lee. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002. 4.

traditional notions of their harmonious interplay."[17] By the May Fourth-era, the assertion of the "individual" (*geren* 個人) as a cultural iconoclast had become a key component of the call for national unity in the face of historical crisis, and "the discourse of individualism finds itself in complicity with nationalism."[18] To study modern subjectivity in China, bifurcated in this way between what Denton calls "romantic individualism and revolutionary collectivism," must account not just for the degree to which writers insist on their literary autonomy, but how this autonomy is represented in relation to their image of the masses.[19] The figure of the crowd, therefore, complicates this dichotomy between the individual and the masses by positioning each in terms of the other.

I am arguing that the invention of the masses in modern China cannot be cleaved from its intellectual and literary origins; as much as its image signifies popular sovereignty and historical determinism, it is also bound to the privileged, singular position of the writer. Like the image of the masses, the social position of the writer itself was undergoing reformulation and designation, a gradual process that would settle on the term *zhishifenzi* 知識份子, which Vera Schwarcz elegantly translates as "knowledgeable

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[17] Denton, Kirk A. *The Problematic of Self in Modern Chinese Literature: Hu Feng and Lu Ling*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998. 41-46.

[18] Liu, Lydia H. *Translingual Practice: Literature, National Culture, and Translated Modernity — China, 1900-1937*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995. 91.

[19] Kirk A. Denton, *The Problematic of Self in Modern Chinese Literature*, 47.

elements of a larger, class-conscious body politic."[20] The paradox implicit in the relationship between the intellectual and the masses would only become increasingly problematic for Chinese writers of the twentieth century (all too often yielding factious and violent consequences), and has moreover produced a literary and artistic outpouring of attempts at reconciliation. For the two subjects of this chapter, the assumption of the intellectual role defined in relation to the image of the crowd he creates has generated a solitary, lyrical anxiety alongside the depictions of the sweep of epic, collective time.

So far I have briefly sketched some intellectual context of some of the literary and historical circumstances in modern China that made the reciprocal confrontation between writer and the crowd such a volatile and ambivalent site of representation. My argument depends on two interconnected, yet contradictory, forces of modernity. The first is the emergence of the intellectual as the self-appointed protagonist of the modernist narrative; the second is the crowd's assumption of the mantle of history in the revolutionary discourse. Caught between these forces is the role of literature as a means of social and political change. Stated simply, the question becomes one of the function of literature in times of revolution. In his study of the aesthetic dimensions of Chinese Marxism, Liu Kang points out that it was in aesthetics that the conflict between the writer and the tide of history was staged, with the construction of revolutionary subjectivity at stake; he

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[20] Schwarcz,Vera. *The Chinese Enlightenment: Intellectuals and the Legacy of the May Fourth Movement of 1919*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986. 9-10. The terminological revision for the "intellectual class" (*zhishi jieji* 知識階級) during the early decades of the twentieth century is revisited when Qu Qiubai re-appropriates the term *wenren* 文人 prior to his execution (see below). Also see Barlow, Tani. "Zhishifenzi [Chinese Intellectuals] and Power." *Dialectical Anthropology* 16:3-4 (1991). 209-232. For a similarly-themed analysis of writers and intellectuals in the 1980s and 1990s, see Yi Hui 易暉. *"Wo" shi shei: Xin shiqi xiaoshuo zhong zhishifenzi de shenfen yishi yanjiu* "我"是誰——新時期小說中知識份子的身分意識研究 (Who Am "I": A Study on the Identity Consciousness of Intellectuals in Fiction of the New Era). Nanchang: Baihuazhou wenyi chubanshe, 2004.

relates the forging of a Marxist aesthetic, pioneered by the May Fourth writers (and by Lu Xun and Qu Qiubai in particular), to the Chinese Revolution in two ways. First, "as a utopian discourse legitimating a socialist and communist universality," and second, "as a hegemonic discourse in constructing a new culture and revolutionary subjectivity."[21] If we take the idealized image of the crowd in Communist aesthetics as a gesture toward this hegemonic universality or egalitarian utopia, how then should we evaluate the writer and intellectual who necessarily maintains a critical distance from the masses, a separation enacted through the very act of writing itself? Martin Jay, in his historical study of the Frankfurt School, frames this intellectual dilemma this way:

> For the radical intellectual who chooses political involvement, however, the desire to maintain a critical distance presents a special problem. Remaining apart, not just from society but from the movement on whose victory he counts, creates an acute tension that is never absent from the lives of serious leftist intellectuals. … At its worst, it produces a sentimental *nostalgie de la boue* ["yearning for the mud," or ascribing higher spiritual values to a group one considers lower than oneself]; at its best, it can lead to an earnest effort to reconcile theory and practice, which takes into account the possibilities for such a unity in an imperfect world.[22]

In the act of narrating historical change and turmoil, the crowd, rather than symbolizing the indivisible, sublime, and harmonious mass, unexpectedly embodies the multilinear, asymmetrical, and heteroglossic.

In many ways, the tension exhibited in the intellectual writer's imagination of the crowd analogizes the desire to overcome the particularities of culture and to achieve the kind of universal, historical totality proposed by modernity. As Haun Saussy points out, "The intellectual problem of the crowd falls under the heading of mereology — the subdivision of ontology that deals with parts, wholes, and their relations."[23] The allure of

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[21] Liu Kang, *Aesthetics and Marxism*, 43.

[22] Jay, Martin. *The Dialectical Imagination: A History of the Frankfurt School and the Institute of Social Research, 1923-1950*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996. xxviii.

[23] Haun Saussy, "Crowds, Number, and Mass in China," 249.

"communist universality" running up against traditional, local theoretical systems that Liu Kang locates in early Chinese left-wing thought is in fact not particular only to the Chinese context, but may be seen as an essential appeal of Marxism as an effort to counter the disorienting forces of modernity. Marshall Berman, in the introduction to his classic study *All That Is Solid Melts into Air*, writes that modernity itself may be characterized as with this kind of universality. However, he writes, "it is a paradoxical unity, a unity of disunity: it pours us all into a maelstrom of perpetual disintegration and renewal, of struggle and contradiction, of ambiguity and anguish."[24] The figure of the modern crowd, as well, promises a metonymical relationship with all crowds, across the world; that is, the crowd may be seen as a mode of overcoming local contingencies to engage the global as a material collective formation, yet nevertheless holds out the potential for alienation, fragmentation, and violence.

As such, the Chinese crowd was viewed not only as a Chinese phenomenon replete with the particular problems and characteristics of Chinese culture (especially in Lu Xun's fiction), but also linked to an international tide of Marxist liberation movements (through the theory of Qu Qiubai). Thus, the ambivalence of the first generation of serious leftist writers and intellectuals in China toward the crowd should not be isolated as a unique cultural phenomenon, but instead as an attempt to shape the contours of an alternative modernity formation that acts as a critique of universal historical determinism (whether capitalist or Marxist) and a *de facto* engagement with modernity on a global scale. Their ambivalence, in this way, testifies to the ongoing, incomplete nature of

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[24] Berman, Marshall. *All That Is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity*. New York: Penguin Books, 1988. 15.

modernity. Keeping in mind how intellectual activity confronts these crowd problems may provide some comparative perspective to deepen my discussion of the efforts of the Chinese intellectuals Lu Xun and Qu Qiubai in imagining the crowd as a way to construct their own role as writers.

The endeavor to stage the crowd as both an object of critique and the mantle for the future serves as a discrete source of apprehension through which we can glimpse these writers' struggles to construct a literature able usher in a modern China. Lu Xun and Qu Qiubai are two representatives of a generation of Chinese writers and intellectuals active during the tumultuous period of the 1920s and early 1930s, when the lines of ideological and literary struggle were under constant and intense debate and reformulation. Each of these authors figured his conception of subjectivity as a mode in dialectical confrontation with the crowd, yet also hoped to theorize a space of literary production that can accommodate them both. Moreover, their dialogue allows these writers to problematize the crowd as both a site of the potential subjective liberation as well as that which confines and traps the expressions of individual self, thereby making the crowd an object of their writing (as a source of hope and despair), while maintaining a painful distance from it (as intellectuals). Each of these writers' attitudes toward and perspectives on the crowd bring the crowd into acute, if equivocating, focus.

Lu Xun: Showing the Crowd

In what has become the foundational moment in the discourse of modern Chinese literature, Lu Xun, while studying medicine in Japan in 1906, came to the realization that

it was through the animating and resonating potential of literature that people's patriotic sensibilities and national spirit could be aroused. As he recollects in the preface to his 1923 book of short stories, *A Call to Arms* (*Nahan* 吶喊), the bacteriology course Lu Xun was attending was shown a lantern slide depicting the execution of a Chinese "spy" accused of working for the Russian enemy during the Russo-Japanese War. Lu Xun's gaze fixates on the crowd that gathers around the scene. Horrified by the seeming passivity and enjoyment of the brutal beheading of one of their fellow countrymen Lu Xun perceives in the crowd, he decides to quit his pursuit of a medical degree in order to heal the sprit of China through literature. The crucial passage reads,

> One day on one of the slides I suddenly saw many Chinese, whom I had not encountered in some time. One in middle was tied up, while many stood around him. Physically they were all strong and robust, but their expressions were apathetic and numb. According to the caption, the one tied up was a spy working for the Russians and was about to have his head cut off by the Japanese army as a public warning, while those who surrounded him had come to appreciate the spectacle. 有一回，我竟在畫片上忽然會見我久違的許多中國人了，一個綁在中間，許多站在左右，一樣是強壯的体格，而顯出麻木的神情。据解説，則綁著的是替俄國做了軍事上的偵探，正要被日軍砍下頭顱來示眾，而圍著的便是來賞鑒這示眾的盛舉的人們。"[25]

Passing quickly over the focal point of the slide, the punishment being exacted upon the victim in the foreground, Lu Xun instead focuses on the crowd element in the periphery and receives his moral injunction to promote literature by way of their negative example.

The execution scene, intended to serve as a public example or warning, *shizhong* 示眾, to the Chinese onlookers, instead serves as a source of visual pleasure to the spectators, which in turn inspires Lu Xun "to transform their spirits 改變他們的精神" through literature. Reading the crowd as synecdochically representative of the Chinese

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[25] Lu Xun, "*Nahan* zixu 《吶喊》自序," *Lu Xun quanji*, Vol. 1, 416. Translation mine. The variation in the translations of the key words of this passage is telling with regard to the translators' assumptions on Lu Xun's attitude toward the crowd. The most recently published translation, for example, quite presumptuously renders "*xuduo Zhongguoren*" as "a great mass of Chinese" and "*shengju de renmen*" as "the appreciative mob." See Lu Xun. *The Real Story of Ah-Q and Other Tales of China: The Complete Fiction of Lu Xun*. Trans. Julia Lovell. New York: Penguin Books, 2009. 17.

populace in general, Lu Xun concludes, "An ignorant and backwards citizenry, no matter how strong and healthy their bodies may be, can only serve as the materials and onlookers of such meaningless public spectacles. 凡是愚弱的國民, 即使體格如何健全, 如何茁裝, 也只能做毫無意義的示眾的材料和看客。"[26] *Shizhong* appear repeatedly in Lu Xun's fiction, serving both as a leitmotif as well as an exhortation; he admonishes the crowd by revealing it in the mirror of his fiction, effectively re-figuring the transitive sense of the term (remonstrating the public crowd by exposing someone to it) into the intransitive (making the crowd visible).[27] The dynamic at work in Lu Xun's utilization of the *shizhong*, which situates the crowd simultaneously as both the subject of exposure (the "materials," or *cailiao* 材料) and the object of demonstration (the audience of "onlookers," or *kanke* 看客) would become a crucial contradiction embedded in his depiction of crowds.

In seeking to transform and heal the crowd, Lu Xun repeatedly reenacts in his fiction this initial moment of literary catalyst. Crowds populate nearly every one of his collections, yet almost invariably take the model depicted in the crucial lantern slide as a narrative antecedent. Lu Xun's exhortation of the crowd, sketching them out in negative relief in order to symptomatically reveal the regressive, even sinister, current of Chinese culture, becomes a way for him to both hold a mirror to the crowd while simultaneously

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[26] Lu Xun, "*Nahan* zixu," 417.

[27] See Yau, Ka-Fai. "'Zhong': Chinese." *Crowds*. Eds. Jeffery T. Schnapp and Matthew Tiews. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006. 262-264. Also relevant in this discussion is the visual medium of the lantern slide. In her reading of the slideshow incident, Rey Chow positions Lu Xun's spectatorship vis-à-vis the filmic image to show the disorienting power of "technologized visuality" exerted on the observer. She interprets Lu Xun's consternation, registered as his conversion from medicine to literature as a means to heal the Chinese people, as not only the result of the violence depicted in the impending execution and the apparent passivity of the crowd that gathers around the victim, but "as an attempt to deal with the filmic spectacle and with his own implication as a spectator." See Rey Chow, *Primitive Passions*, 4-11. For more on the visual and technological aspect of this scene, see Chapters 3 and 4.

setting his own spectatorship in sharp contrast to them. In this respect, his technique elicits comparison with the very system of admonition that offends him, the practice *shizhong* used by the Japanese army shown in the slideshow. That is, while the method of *shizhong* in the hands of the state demonstrates its imperial authority through public humiliation, punishment, and execution, but to the crowd comprises a spectacle (*shengju* 盛舉) that they may aesthetically appreciate (*shangjian* 賞鑒), Lu Xun restores the admonitory function of *shizhong* through his literary authority by impugning the crowd as the vessel for the fundamental problems of Chinese culture. For Lu Xun, therefore, *shizhong* carries added dimensions of complexity by multiplying the points of spectatorship in his fiction, an operation effected by the subtle linguistic turns of *shizhong*, from a public warning, to a spectacle worthy of admiration, and finally to his own literary aim, which shows the crowd to itself. His work would continue to display, however, deep ambivalence concerning the fine distinction in literary production between creating aesthetically valuable work and writing with the purpose of affecting social relations.

Multiple layers of crowds and collective identification are embedded in Lu Xun's recollection of the lantern slide scene. Besides the crowd watching the execution on the slide, Lu Xun is himself part of a larger audience. Surrounded by Japanese classmates who are ostensibly the target of the wartime propaganda, Lu Xun feels obligated to "join in with my classmates clapping and cheering in the lecture hall. 須常常隨喜我那同學們的拍手和喝采。"[28] Mimicking his classmates' patriotic reaction intensifies his

[28] Lu Xun, "*Nahan* zixu," 416.

alienation from the Chinese crowd on the slide even more, yet also aligns him with it in terms of his positional perspective; each demonstrates the "lesson" to be learned by the spectacle of the *shizhong*. Therefore we can see how, in Lu Xun's retrospective writing of the scene, how the *shizhong* not only constitutes both the crowd as the intended object of of his fictional enterprise, but also defines his own role in relation to the crowd represented on the slide. Yet this role is also marked by his own failure to distinguish himself from the Japanese crowd of spectators; rather than being galvanized into solidarity with his fellow Chinese, his "double sense of of one observer's alienation and complicity," as Marston Anderson calls it, prevents him from achieving any feeling of belonging.[29] The self-conscious position Lu Xun finds himself in, successively displaced from each of the crowds he encounters, not only suggests the failure of the *shizhong* to impart its message of warning to the crowd the execution is meant to represent (instead turning it into a spectacle of enjoyment), but also, as shown below, implies that a similar impediment exists in Lu Xun's own literary endeavor of social transformation.

David Der-wei Wang locates a "narratorial crack" in Lu Xun's utilization of the decapitation motif, precipitating a "rupture of meaning" that continues to haunt the Chinese literary imagination.[30] The violence that Wang identifies further draws our attention to the severing distance between the writer's desire for an enlightened readership and his careful maintenance of this divide; an epistemological posture that cleaves the mind (of the intellectual) from the body (politic). An even more belated

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[29] Marston Anderson, *The Limits of Realism*, 78.

[30] Wang, David Der-wei. *The Monster That Is History: History, Violence, and Fictional Writing in Twentieth-Century China*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004. 21-22.

recollection of this decisive moment was written in 1926 in a piece intended to pay tribute to his teacher at the Medical College in Sendai, Fujino Genkurou 藤野嚴九郎. In contrast to the preface of *A Call to Arms*, "Fujino Sensei" (*Tengye xiansheng* 藤野先生) takes a more personal approach and marks Lu Xun's first-person narrator more precisely as a single Chinese in a foreign land. His description of the episode, rather than epistemically momentous, is dejectedly personal:

> Among these [lantern slides] there were also some Chinese who had acted as spies for the Russians and were captured by the Japanese and shot. They were surrounded by a crowd of Chinese, and I was there, too, in the classroom.
>
> "Banzai!" The students clapped their hands and cheered.
>
> They gave this cheer at every single slide we saw, but for this kind the sound was particularly shrill. After I returned to China I saw this kind of crowd blithely watching criminals being shot, who also cheered and hollered as if they were drunk. There's nothing that can be done!
>
> 但偏有中國人夾在里邊：給俄國做偵探，被日本軍捕獲，要槍斃了，圍著看的也是一群中國人；在講堂里的還有一個我。
>
> "万歲！"他們都拍掌歡呼起來。
>
> 這種歡呼，是每看一片都有的，但在我，這一聲卻別听得刺耳。此後回到中國來，我看見那些閒看槍斃犯人的人們，他們也何嘗不酒醉似的喝彩—嗚呼，無法可想！[31]

Here the secondary crowd, mentioned only in passing in the first recollection, is fleshed out more clearly. Lu Xun clearly delineates his estrangement from his boisterous classmates and the stupefied Chinese crowds on the slide, stressing his solitariness in the classroom with the singular and redundant *yige* 一個 modifying the "I" (*wo* 我). In the structure of the sentence, Lu Xun's singularity is matched explicitly with the Chinese crowd that watches the execution (*yi qun Zhongguoren* 一群中國人). But is this syntactical association bringing the distant Lu Xun into sympathetic identification with the Chinese crowd, or signifying his disaffection? His return to China does not resolve the sense of disjunction; the correspondence of crowds in both the Japanese classroom and in China suggests that his relationship with his countrymen is as equally

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[31] Lu Xun, "Tengye xiansheng 藤野先生," *Lu Xun quanji*, Vol. 1, 306. Translation mine.

"discordant" (*cier* 刺耳) as amongst the foreign students.[32] The presentation of such "vertiginous interplay" of identification and difference between layers of crowds and the individual Lu Xun suggests that the depiction of the crowd brings into relief his own position and role as singular intellectual.[33]

These two recollections, written almost four years apart, form a dialogue that informs Lu Xun's complex relationship with the *shizhong*. While on one hand he condemns the crowd of spectators for callously taking visual pleasure in the execution of their countryman, his own perspective from a foreign land, surrounded by classmates who joyfully partake in the nationalist spectacle obliges him to identify with the callous crowd projected before him. The one character who goes almost unmentioned in his depictions may end up best representing Lu Xun's sense of exclusion and despair: that of the executed man. Lu Xun's own sense of hopelessness evidently grew in the years between these two recollections; whereas the first remembrance of the incident with the lantern slide spurned him to "transform the spirits" of the Chinese through literature, the second perfunctorily exclaims that there is simply nothing anyone can do (*wufa kexiang* 無法可想). His individual authorial spectator recreates the moment of his estrangement, fragmenting himself from the possibility of wholeness the crowd offers. Yet, by framing his own individuality within its social, transformative efficacy, Lu Xun invests his literature with an interpretive indeterminacy that, like the crowd itself, carries a promise for collective, national rejuvenation, but only by way of negativity.

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[32] "Discordant" is Hsien-yi and Gladys Yang's English translation. See Lu Hsun. "Mr. Fujino." *Selected Works of Lu Hsun*. Vol. 2. Trans. Hsien-yi Yang and Gladys Yang. Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1956. 408.

[33] David Der-wei Wang, *The Monster That Is History*, 24.

In Elias Canetti's study of the types and behavior of crowds, he identifies the public execution as one of the most powerful examples of generating the sense of "discharge" that marks the crowd as such. The feeling of a density and equality produced at the execution grounds confronts the crowd with its own existence; "The threat of death hangs over all men," Canetti writes, "and however disguised it may be, even if it is sometimes forgotten, it affects them all the time and creates in them a need to deflect death on to others."[34] The elation produced among the crowd at the execution of the condemned, the kind of mirth so reviled by Lu Xun, is, according to Canetti, so life-affirming that it prefigures a related type of crowd, the festival crowd. Expulsion of the execution's victim now complete, equality prevails.

Canetti's analysis brings to mind Michel Foucault's argument on public torture and execution in his treatise *Discipline and Punish*. Canetti's typology of the crowd is grounded in prehistory; he perceives the "primitive dynamic" of hunting packs between the crowd and the victim. Likewise, Foucault sees a persistence of the structural forms of phenomena like the *shizhong*, but contends that it serves the purpose of extending the authority of the state over the body politic. In this way, Foucault writes, the public execution was "more than act of justice; it was a manifestation of force; or rather, it was justice as the physical, material and awesome force of the sovereign deployed there. The ceremony of the public torture and execution displayed for all to see the power relation that gave force to the law."[35] Power was inscribed onto the bodies of the condemned, and

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[34] Canetti, Elias. *Crowds and Power*. Trans. Carol Stewart. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1984. 54.

[35] Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Trans. Alan Sheridan. New York: Vintage Books, 1995. 50.

through the ritual of execution, was "exalted and strengthened by its visible manifestations."[36] Foucault also notes, however, the ambiguous role of the audience that observes such grisly ceremonies. The people in this setting are more than just passive onlookers, but in fact constitute the "main character" of the drama enacted before them, "whose real and immediate presence was required for the performance."[37] The crowd's presence as witness was necessary to complete the circuit of the display of power, but also possessed the vague threat of revolt, directed either at the victim (in sympathy or rage), or at the practice itself.

Foucault's book goes on to elaborate on the techniques of punishment, imprisonment, and discipline wielded by the state in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and how these systems gradually subtly grew more specific, refined, and, ultimately, modern. We may think of the "political technology of the body" that allows for the creation of modern structures politics and economies described by Foucault as a kind of antithesis of Benedict Anderson's thesis of the "imagined community." In Anderson's formulation, it was "print-capitalism," epitomized by the novel, newspaper, and other forms of print capitalism, that "made it possible for rapidly growing numbers of people to think about themselves, and to relate themselves to others, in profoundly new ways."[38] Given the way that Chinese intellectuals championed various fiction magazines, journals, and serial novels championed by intellectuals of modern China, one may concur with Anderson's argument on the role of the proliferation of print media in modern China

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[36] Ibid., 57.

[37] Ibid.

[38] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 36.

as part of an effort to provoke a modern, national consciousness. However, this abstract notion of a public enlightened by the printed word is challenged by Lu Xun's fixation with the gruesome, material spectacle of the *shizhong*.

In fact, in the "Preface to *A Call to Arms*," Lu Xun moves directly from his depiction of the slideshow (a media that itself also participates in Anderson's concept of the imagined community) to his promotion of a new fiction journal called *New Life* (Xinsheng 新生) in the wake of the experience. The project was prematurely aborted, however, and Lu Xun sank into despair over the realization of the futility of such intellectual activity:

> To cry out alone among the living with no response whatsoever, neither approval or opposition, is like being left alone in the boundless wilderness, helpless. With this sense of of despair, I began to feel lonely. [...]
>
> In spite of my immeasurable despair, I nonetheless held no resentment. This experience caused me to reflect on myself, and I found that I was definitely no hero who could mobilize a crowd with a single call to action.
>
> 獨有叫喊于生人中，而生人并無反應，既非贊同，也無反對，如置身毫無邊際的荒原，無可措手的了，這是怎樣的悲哀呵，我于是以我所感到者為寂寞。[...]
>
> 然而我雖然自有無端的悲哀，卻也并不憤懣，因為這經驗使我反省，看見自己了：就是我決不是一個振臂一呼應者云集的英雄。[39]

Lu Xun's sense of helplessness and loneliness in his efforts to transform the masses through new narrative forms and technological media link the contradictory images of the crowd that he develops in his writing. The juxtaposition of these two anecdotes, I am arguing, tells us much about not only Lu Xun's ambivalence toward masses and crowds and the formation of his own intellectual position in relation to them, but moreover, the paradox involved in representing the crowd itself. Canetti, like Lu Xun, moves from an analysis of crowd behavior at public executions to remarks on modern print media. Newspapers, rather than bringing about the enlightened consciousness of national

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[39] Lu Xun, "*Nahan* zixu," 417.

community, perpetuate and contain the visceral thrill of the execution spectacle. Without the shared participation in the execution itself, the modern reader can instead "sit peacefully at home and, out of a hundred details, can choose those to linger over which offer a special thrill."[40] The reading public, Canetti concludes, may be "the most despicable and, at the same time, most stable form of such a crowd."

The ambivalence Lu Xun expresses toward the masses, then, is precisely the paradoxical nature of the crowd as both the collective hope for China's future and the haunting persistence of the bloodthirsty past. For Lu Xun, the most disconcerting aspect of the *shizhong* crowd is the visual pleasure it indulges in at the spectacle of execution, perhaps most vividly represented in the ending of his novella *The True Story of Ah Q* (Ah Q zhengzhuan 阿Q正傳). Though the climactic scene of execution in *Ah Q* contains one of the most powerful imaginaries of the crowd in Chinese literature, the sense of the crowd is present throughout the story, and internalized in Ah Q to the degree that his own actions incorporate or are based on a presumed reaction from the cruel and seemingly omnipresent village society.

As the frequent victim of public mockery and beatings, Ah Q not only seeks out victims lower than himself on the social ladder to scorn and disparage in order to replenish his own pride (such as the Buddhist nun who becomes an object of his taunting), but develops a repertoire of psychological defense mechanisms the narrator refers to as Ah Q's "method of spiritual victory" (*jingshen shang de shenglifa* 精神上的勝利法). In one instance, after a ruckus at the gambling tables in which he suffers yet

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[40] Elias Canetti, *Crowds and Power*, 52.

another beating and lost all of his winnings, his methods fail him, and "this time he really tasted something of the bitterness of defeat. 他這回才有些感到失敗的苦痛了。" Lu Xun continues,

> But presently he changed defeat into victory. Raising his right hand he slapped his own face hard twice, so that it tingled with pain. After this slapping his heart felt lighter, for it seemed as if the one who had given the slap was himself, the one slapped some other self, and soon it was just as if he had beaten someone else — in spite of the fact that his face was still tingling. He lay down satisfied that he had gained the victory. 但他立刻轉敗為胜了。他擎起右手，用力的在自己臉上連打了兩個嘴巴，熱剌剌的有些痛；打完之后，便心平气和起來，似乎打的是自己，被打的是別一個自己，不久也就仿佛是自己打了別個一般，——雖然還有些熱剌剌，——心滿意足的得胜的躺下了。[41]

Most analysis of Lu Xun's story focus on interpreting the target of his biting satire in the character of Ah Q, particularly in terms of the debates in literary circles over "national character" (*guominxing* 國民性) throughout the 1920s. Leo Ou-fan Lee points out that Ah Q quite literally embodies a "face in the crowd" that Lu Xun witnesses in the lantern slide, calling him "the crowd's summary mirror-image."[42] Ah Q occupies the dual space as both part of the crowd, as a perpetrator of the moral deprivation that Lu Xun is condemning, as well as its repeated victim.[43] Lu Xun's own ambivalence toward the crowd is evident in his characterization of Ah Q as both representative of the crowd's callous self-delusion, as well his own narrator's measured sympathy for him as a victim of the crowd's bloodlust, as seen in the story's conclusion.

By the end of the story, Ah Q is convicted of a crime he did not commit, but, as the story indifferently makes clear, may as well have. On the way to the execution grounds, he remains unaware that he is being made the object of *shizhong*, "but if he had

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[41] Lu Xun, *Ah Q zhengzhuan* 阿Q正傳, *Lu Xun quanji*, Vol. 1, 494. English in Lu Hsun, "The True Story of Ah Q," *Selected Works of Lu Hsun*, Vol. 1, 87.

[42] Lee, Leo Ou-fan, *Voices from the Iron House*, 77.

[43] Marston Anderson relates this duality to Rene Girard's notion of the "sacrificial victim" as being "both a part of his community and apart from it." See Marston Anderson, *The Limits of Realism*, 80-85.

known," Lu Xun writes, "it would have been the same; he would only have thought that in this world probably it was the fate of everybody at some time to be paraded through the streets and made a public example of. 但即使知道也一樣，他不過便以為人生天地間，大約本來有時也未免要游街要示眾罷了。"[44] Rather than proclaim the injustice of the unfair execution, Ah Q's has internalized the idea of a performative role that panders to the crowd, and instead recites lines of the defiant hero-type from popular operas. His fate sealed before the crowd, the narrative suddenly and empathetically assumes the perspective of Ah Q as he awaits the fatal blow:

> Sharp and dull at the same time, these eyes had already devoured his words and now sought to tear into something beyond mere flesh and bone. Neither closing in nor dropping back by so much as half a step, they stalked him with a persistent tenacity. And then they all merged into a single set of fangs that ripped and tore at Ah Q's soul. 又鈍又鋒利，不但已經咀嚼他皮肉以外的東西，永是不遠不近的跟他走.這些眼睛們似乎連成一氣，已經在那里咬他的靈魂。

Contained within this image, one of the most powerful in modern Chinese literature, is Lu Xun's haunting condemnation of the Chinese society. The audience before which Ah Q is paraded cannibalistically feasts on him with their eyes, suggesting the social corrective reasoning behind *shizhong* is not just unsuccessful, but has actually an opposite, detrimental effect on the crowd: their group fellowship actually heightens their barbarism. Canetti's moment of discharge, when the passive audience is transfigured into an active crowd, contains an uncanny reversal of Lu Xun's image here: when the executioner displays the severed head to the assembly, which itself "consists of staring heads," the crowd "attains its feeling of equality during the moment that the head stares back at it."[45] The horrifying resolution between the singular, executed victim and the

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[44] Lu Xun, *Ah Q zhengzhuan*, 525. English in Lu Hsun, "The True Story of Ah Q," 132-133. Translation modified.

[45] Elias Canetti, *Crowds and Power*, 51.

multiplicity of eyes that devour him is produced in a remarkably similar image as the sublime encounter between the Mara poet and the reverent audience; both of the elevated men engender a cultural and political wholeness to the group of spectators. Instead of the effect of positive transformation, however, the crowd we see at the end of *Ah Q* is brought into a monstrous totality.

A less menacing, but equally degenerate example of crowd dynamics in Lu Xun's fiction can be found in the short story "A Public Example" (*Shizhong* 示眾). As indicated by the title, the story concerns the public display of a alleged criminal, but the exact nature of his crime is unknown, as the single literate member of the crowd fails at making out the characters describing the offense painted on the prisoner's vest. A couple of young boys' attempts to get a better view are frustrated by the crowd's other onlookers as Lu Xun's narrative focuses less on the object of *shizhong*, and more on showing the crowd to itself. At one point one of the boys, negotiating the throng of bodies, emerges on the other side of the crowd's gaze:

> A semicircle of humanity surrounds this open space; the place of honor is taken by a man wearing a white vest. Standing to one side there is a bare-armed fat boy; behind the boy there stands a red-nosed fat man. Now the student vaguely begins to recognize the nature of that magnificent obstacle that impeded his progress a moment or so before; he marvels at the sight and now gazes with admiration at the red-nosed fat man from afar. Fat Boy, having noticed the schoolboy as soon as the latter had squeezed his way out of the crowd, cannot help himself from following the direction of the schoolboy's gaze. And now as he turns his head to seek out the object of the schoolboy's admiration, he is confronted by a very large plump breast, around the nipple of which several long hairs protrude. 外面圍這一圈人，上首是穿白背心的，那對面是一個赤膊的胖小孩，胖小孩後面是一個赤膊的紅鼻子胖大漢。他這時隱約悟出現前的偉大的障礙物的本體了，便驚奇佩服似的只望著紅鼻子。胖小孩本是注視著小學生的臉的，於是也不禁依了他的眼光，回轉頭去了，在那裡是一個很胖的奶子，奶頭四進有幾枝很長的毫毛。[46]

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[46] Lu Xun, "Shizhong 示眾," *Lu Xun quanji*, Vol. 2, 70. English in Lu Xun. "A Warning to the People." *Diary of a Madman and Other Stories*. Trans. William A. Lyell. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1990. 293.

The reversal of perspective is unsettling as the boy is able to take in the crowd as a whole. The crowd (along with Lu Xun) devotes more time to looking at itself; through this shifting perspective, Lu Xun exposes the crowd not just as spectators, but also as a spectacle in itself, a move laden with ambivalence. On one hand, when we consider his statement in the preface on the passive crowd's lack of fitness for anything other than to "can only serve as the materials and onlookers of such meaningless public spectacles," than this kind of *shizhong* crowd is incapable of being taught anything. However, he is on the other hand revealing something potentially redeeming through the crowd's visual dynamic. A crowd cannot acquire a sense of will or power until it is capable of perceiving itself as a unified whole. By presenting this kind of visual proficiency of spectatorship from the point of view of the crowd, perhaps Lu Xun is attempting to summon the crowd in ways that differ from his preface to *A Call to Arms* and *Ah Q*. A modern crowd capable of enacting social change may be brought into being through this kind of transformation of perception.

Despite the leftist turn Lu Xun would make later in the decade and his subsequent (though conditional) advocacy for so-called "revolutionary literature (*geming wenxue* 革命文學)" that enlists the powerful rhetoric and imagery of the masses, the capacity for debased, infernal violence would never be entirely absent from his conception of the crowd. For Lu Xun, the onlooker crowd serves not only as sinister remnant of the barbaric modes of collective mentality, but also conveys his own inability to reach them through literary means. Lu Xun's repeated use of the *shizhong* motif therefore, also serves as a fictional limit: if literature can only in the end reenact the *shizhong* discourse

(as a measure of public disciplinary), rendering direct communication all but impossible, then the most he can hope for is to show the crowd, and set this dynamic in motion.

For Lu Xun, ceaseless self-inspection and doubt about his own role as an intellectual and his fiction's social efficacy reveal a fundamental dilemma that, from this perspective, is already apparent in the Nietzschean ideal he expresses in his Mara poetry essay. That is, how can a grammar of transformation be effectively transmitted to the social body as a whole? Lu Xun's fiction represents this dilemma with unflinching acuity; and yet more often than not, his piercing criticism ends up being directed inwardly, toward his own separation from the masses and reinforced by his social status as an intellectual. His isolation in this regard reaches its height in *Wild Grass* (Ye cao 野草), a collection of prose poems published in 1927. Incisive in tone and experimental in form, the short pieces of *Wild Grass* constitute a severe self-examination of the author himself and in particular his self-appointed role as the vanguard of cultural enlightenment. In one piece, "Revenge No. 2" (*Fuchou qi'er* 復仇［其二］), Lu Xun depicts the public display and crucifixion of Christ. Lu Xun's Christ, however, gains a degree of satisfaction and even pleasure from his righteous position from which to pity the bloodthirsty crowd:

> In the pain from his hands and feet he savors the sorrow of he pitiable creatures who are crucifying the Son of God and who know that the Son of God is about to die. Sudden agony from his broken bones shoots to his hearty and marrow, intoxicating him with great ecstasy and compassion. 他在手足的痛楚中，玩味著可憫的人們的釘殺神之子的悲哀和可咒詛的人們要釘殺神之子，而神之子就要被釘殺了的歡喜。突然間，碎骨的大痛楚透到心髓了，他即沈酣於大歡喜和大悲憫中。"[47]

[47] Lu Xun, "Fuchou (qi'er) 复仇（其二）," *Lu Xun quanji*, Vol. 2, 172. English in Lu Hsun, "Revenge," *Selected Works of Lu Hsun*, Vol. 1, 321.

The crowd's impulse to "execrable" (*zhouzu* 咒詛) violence in the spectacular ritual of *shizhong* provides the victim not only an opportunity to critique the crowd for its excess, but also is able to also revel in his vantage point and indulge in pity for the crowd. That Lu Xun spared neither himself nor those who shared his social status from this critique suggests the extent to which his subjectivity was constructed around this *shizhong* disciplinary imaginary.

Despite his dexterity and accomplishment at writing fiction however, after 1927 he virtually ceased working in the fictional medium, choosing instead to concentrate his cultural and literary criticism in essay writing (developing the "miscellany" [*zawen* 雜文] style) and translation, primarily from Russian. His personal disillusionment from the fictional genres suggests a reevaluation of his aesthetic and political priorities after the disasters of the March Eighteenth Massacre (*San yiba can'an* 三·一八慘案) in 1926, in which two of his students at Beijing Women's Normal University were killed, and the failed urban uprisings of 1927, one of which he was a witness to while living in Guangzhou. As Lu Xun's doubts on the efficacy of literature to engender revolution surface more explicitly, his criticism of those still arguing for literature's place at the vanguard of cultural revolution grew sharper. In a portentous speech given to the Whampoa Military Academy (*Huangpu junxiao* 黃埔軍校) in April of 1927, he dismisses those who claim to write "people's literature (*pingmin wenxue* 平民文學)":

> Some writers today use the common people — workers and peasants — as material for their novels and poems, and this has also been called people's literature when actually it is nothing of the sort, for the people have not opened their mouths yet. These works voice the sentiments of onlookers, who put words in the people's mouths. 在現在，有人以平民——工

> 人農民——為材料，作小説做詩，我們也稱之為平民文學，其實這不是平民文學，因為平民還沒有開口。這是另外的人從旁看見平民的生活，假托平民底口吻而説的。[48]

Here, the "bystanders" he so thoroughly despises in his earlier fiction become the so-called "revolutionary" writers that profess to speak on behalf of the crowd while simply imposing their own perspective from the sidelines. Interestingly, though the target of his critique is the intellectual class, the term *cailiao*, "material," recalls his earlier condemnation of the crowd in the slideshow. Lu Xun's increasing hostility led to attacks from both those on the right who argued for total authorial autonomy, as well as those on the left who accused Lu Xun of holding reactionary views. Contemporary cultural and literary critic Wang Hui 汪暉 upholds Lu Xun as the consummate intellectual of his age precisely due to this unceasing "resistance to all unequal relations": "What finally still concerns Lu Xun is the relation between rulers and the ruled, as well as the reproductive mechanism of this relation. 鲁迅始終關心的是統治關係及其再生產機制。"[49] From this perspective, Lu Xun's use of the *shizhong* becomes more than an narrative image or motif, but a powerful inquiry into this "reproductive mechanism," one in which his own social practice of literature is at stake.

For Lu Xun's part, while he never joined any political party, the crisis of the Chinese revolution during these years compelled him to undertake a thoroughgoing study of Marxist theory. Though his Marxist turn in the late 1920s and 30s gave credibility to the cause of revolutionary literature, it also prematurely suspends his powerful fictional

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[48] Lu Xun, "Geming shidai de wenxue 革命時代的文學," *Lu Xun quanji*, Vol. 3, 422. English in Lu Hsun, "Literature of a Revolutionary Period," *Selected Works of Lu Hsun*, Vol. 2, 332.

[49] Wang Hui 汪暉. "'Si huo' chongwen '死火'重溫." *Fankang juewang: Lu Xun ji qi wenxue shijie* 反抗絕望：魯迅及其文學世界. Shijiazhuang: Hebei jiaoyu chubanshe, 2000. English in Wang Hui. "Dead Fire Rekindled: Lu Xun as Revolutionary Intellectual." *The End of Revolution*. New York: Verso, 2010. 204.

engagement with the crowd imagination. In Marxist theory, the crowd metonymically stands for the oppressed revolutionary masses, thus substituting the abstract and active notion of "the people" for the unstable and alienating crowd. Nevertheless, Lu Xun's drift to the left only intensified the theoretical exploration for commensurability between the subjective nature of fictional narrative and the necessity of achieving a collective historical consciousness. One of Lu Xun's staunchest defenders and closest friends during this period of intense literary debate and political turmoil was Qu Qiubai, the former chair of the Communist Party and leader of the newly established League of Left-Wing Writers (*Zuoyi zuojia lianmeng* 左翼作家聯盟). I now turn to Qu in order to extend my discussion of the crowd and its participation in the construction of the self-image of the revolutionary literary figure.

Qu Qiubai: The Superfluous One

Qu Qiubai and Lu Xun became fast friends during Qu's tenure as the unofficial head of the League, a group Lu Xun played a major role in establishing and whose participation gave the League a sense of credibility and inclusiveness. Meant to serve as a kind of united front for leftist writers after the fractious debates over the nature of revolutionary literature in the late 1920s and into the 1930s, as well as to put an end to the divisive attacks on Lu Xun and Mao Dun 茅盾 from the left, indeed provided progressive intellectuals with a forum for theoretical validation of literary radicalism and

an organizational framework to influence social thought in these crucial years.[50] Over a period of eighteen months in 1932 and 1933, Lu Xun and Qu collaborated on several translation projects of Russian writers and Marxist literary theorists, as well as honing the theoretical basis for China's proletarian literature movement, highlighting the League's most productive period from its establishment to Qu's departure from Shanghai in early 1934.[51] They were particularly active together during the debate over the so-called "third category" (*di san zhong ren* 第三種人), which they both thoroughly rejected as inconceivable in revolutionary China. Qu dismissed the idea that a writer could somehow transcend class and write with complete objectivity as an example of "bystanderism" (*pangguanzhuyi* 旁觀主義), recalling Lu Xun's earlier condemnation of those writers who believe they are able to replicate the crowd through mere spectatorship.[52] There is little doubt of the influence they impressed on each other. Qu, as the foremost Marxist literary theoretician of his time, strengthened Lu Xun's leftist and revolutionary convictions, while Lu Xun's powerful mode of critique in the *zawen* essay provided Qu with the formal means of expressing his own critical appraisal of the May

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[50] Despite its significance as an integrated whole in opposition to the KMT government, serious fractures in the group continued to fester, in particular on the question of where leftist intellectuals and writers stood in relation to the proletarian masses. The contentiousness of this issue would culminate in the dissolution of the League in 1936 over debates centered around the "Two Slogans Polemic" (*liang ge kouhao lunzheng* 兩個口號論爭)," which pitted Lu Xun, just before his death, and his follower Hu Feng 胡風 against Zhou Yang 周揚, the League's leader after Qu left Shanghai, as well as the official CCP representative. For more on the history of the League, see Wong, Wang-chi. *Politics and Literature in Shanghai: The League of Left-Wing Writers, 1930-1936*. New York: Manchester University Press, 1991.

[51] For an insightful and thorough analysis of Lu Xun and Qu Qiubai's relationship, see Pickowicz, Paul G. "Lu Xun through the Eyes of Qu Qiubai: New Perspectives on Chinese Marxist Literary Polemics of the 1930s." *Modern China* 2:3 (July 1976). 327-368.

[52] Marston Anderson, *The Limits of Realism*. 58-59.

Fourth Movement.[53] The two intellectuals' remarkable friendship moreover contributes to the impression that each was alienated to a degree from the revolutionary literature movement of which they comprised the vanguard; the solace each took in finding a kindred spirit thus speaks to the complexity of their respective bonds to the masses.

Qu's 1933 "Preface to the Selected Essays of Lu Xun (*Lu Xun zagan xuanji xuyan* 《鲁迅雜感選集》序言)" contains a very prescient, if sympathetic, analysis of the evolution of Lu Xun's thought that furthermore provides glimpses into his own perspective on modern Chinese literature. Qu's dialectical reading of Lu Xun's development into a leftist intellectual and application of Marxist categories of class and history in his appraisal of modern literature is significant enough, but, by focusing on Lu Xun's intellectual position at these various points of historical uncertainty, he is able to reveal how Lu Xun's subjective experience within the literary discourse allowed him to achieve the perspective where the principles of revolutionary literature became self-evident. Qu writes,

> Before the May Fourth Movement, the main trends in Lu Xun's philosophy were the theories of evolution and emancipation of the individual. He had high hopes of youth, boldly attacked the moribund rule of feudal society and demanded the emancipation of the individual. But by degrees he came to understand the class system of feudalism and the multifold oppression of Chinese society. […] Of course, the arguments used were not Marxist ones, but simply based on his own experience of life. 魯迅在"五四"前的思想，進化論和個性主義還是他的基本。他熱烈的希望著青年，他勇猛的襲繫著宗法社會的僵尸統治，要求個性的解放。

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[53] The *zawen* essay is characterized by its powerful and critical "tone" that "taps into the Chinese theory of powerful emotion." This rhetoric of moral indignation (held together by "the idea of combat itself"), according to anthropologist Mary Scoggin, played an important role in the formation of "spontaneous communitas." See Scoggin, Mary. "Tone and the Moral Imagination: An Anthropological Look at Chinese Literary Battles." *Anthropology and Humanism* 25:2 (December 2000). 143-170. Moreover, Pickowicz notes that the significance of Qu and Lu Xun's friendship "lies in the fact that it was precisely in the period of greatest unity within the leftist literary movement that Qu sought to elevate Lu Xun's *intellectual* standing. While others were content to employ Lu Xun as a symbol, Qu attempted to highlight the immediate relevance of his thought for the purpose of rectifying what he believed to be weaknesses within the League itself." See Paul G. Pickowicz, "Lu Xun Through the Eyes of Qu Qiubai," 330.

> 可是，不久他就漸漸的了解到封建的等級制度和中國社會里的層壓榨。 […] 自然，這不是社會科學的論文，這只是直感的生活經驗。[54]

Lu Xun's relentless negative criticism of the intelligentsia class (which included, significantly, himself as well as Qu) helped expose the rifts and contradictions in the literary and enlightenment movements and, furthermore, their failure to connect with the proletarian masses. In particular, through Lu Xun's prophetic anticipation of so much of the shape of the literary debates over revolutionary literature in the second half of the 1920s, Qu is able to conceive of the literary revolution as an ongoing and incomplete process of dialectical interaction between the individualist writer and the collective that has assumed the burden of history. Furthermore, one cannot help but perceive parallels between Qu's evaluation of the criticism of Lu Xun and the condemnations he himself received after his inopportune stint as the de facto leader of the Chinese Communist Party in 1927 and 1928.

Although one may trace this acute apprehension of the contradiction between the singular (bourgeois) writer writing on behalf of a collective (proletarian) unity throughout Qu's intellectual career, the particular issue of crowds is more difficult to locate in Qu than Lu Xun for the simple reason that physical crowds do not occupy nearly as prominent place as a motif in his writing; Qu's work features more of a lyrical and personal style and is filled with the enthusiasm and despair of a young man striving for solutions to his nation's problems, yet constrained by his physical and emotional reservations. However, I am contending that Qu's individual, writerly subjectivity is based in part on his investment in the crowd; the crowd's presence, in this way, is felt

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[54] Qu Qiubai 瞿秋白. "'Lu Xun zagan xuanji' xuyan《魯迅雜感選集》序言." *Qu Qiubai wenji* 瞿秋白文集 (Collected Writings of Qu Qiubai). Vol. 3. Beijing: Renmin wenxue chuban she, 1985. 108. English in Paul G. Pickowicz, "Lu Xun Through the Eyes of Qu Qiubai," 348.

through its conspicuous absence, and specifically in the repeated reference to his own superfluity. In contrast to Lu Xun's confrontational spectacle of the *shizhong* and the haunting barbarism of the mob, what we see in Qu Qiubai's work is the desire to overcome his the intellectual's predetermined singularity and locate a place within a sublime, revolutionary mass.

The crowd for Qu Qiubai is rarely overtly visible, or addressed directly; instead it constitutes a prevailing ethos, an object of utopian yearning. Thus, rather than depict the crowd through direct image, Qu constructs an image of the crowd alongside his own superfluous position, filtered through his sense of the intellectual's role history and revolution. His investment in the crowd provoked his efforts to engender a broad cultural and popular revolution among the lower classes of China and is framed in broad, abstract strokes drawn from Marxist philosophy and Buddhist thought. Put simply, the crowd constitutes the utopian ideal of wholeness for Qu, who, despite his considerable efforts and ideological commitments, is unable (or unwilling) to forego his individual, literary sensibilities at the end. Thus, as in Lu Xun, the crowd marks the limit of Qu's subjectivity, the possibility of consummation with which would signify both he completion, as well as the loss of subjectivity.

My argument differs from other critics who have previously made similar observations, including perhaps Qu himself. T.A. Hsia, for example, notes "nothing can induce us to describe Ch'ü Ch'iu-po [Qu Qiubai] as a disloyal Communist, but what makes him such a fascinating study is that he wrote at great length about himself."[55]

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[55] Hsia, Tsi-an. *The Gates of Darkness: Studies on the Leftist Literary Movement in China*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1968. 5.

Characterizing him as a "tenderhearted Communist," Hsia acknowledges Qu's first two books, *A Journey to the Land of Hunger* (E xiang jicheng 餓鄉紀程) and *History of the Heart in the Red Capital* (Chi du xin shi 赤都心史), as "not mere travelogues or propaganda, but are concerned with the author's mental state in the critical years in poverty-stricken Russia when he was changing from a non-Communist into a Communist."[56] Nevertheless, Hsia goes on to take Qu at his word when he declares in *Superfluous Words* (Duoyu de hua 多餘的話), the final written work before his execution, that he possesses a "dual personality" (*er yuan renwu* 二元人物),[57] allowing Hsia to place the two terms of his wonderful appellation in contrast: the "tenderhearted," or lyrical, aspect of Qu's personality connotes a "silent protest against the totalitarian movement," or the historically epic trajectory of Communism.[58] Hsia's reading, valuable as it is, neglects the simultaneity of these contradictory features of Qu's subjectivity.

Rather than set these lyrical and epic aspects of Qu's writing in opposition, I read the opposing contrasts in Qu's "schizophrenia" as inseparable and working in a kind of disjunctive cooperation. That is, while I do not deny the inherent contradiction they present, I am suggesting that the lyrical and epic constitute a reciprocal dynamic analogous, respectively, to the individual and the masses. Instead of reconciling these parts into a *political* whole, the lyrical and epic characteristics reveal the desire for (impossible) union between the individual and the masses in Qu's *literary* production. Qu's assertion at the end of life to his own superfluity may not only be seen as a

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[56] Ibid.

[57] Qu Qiubai 瞿秋白. "Duoyu de hua 多餘的話." *Qu Qiubai wenji*, Vol. 7, 700-703.

[58] Tsi-an Hsia, *The Gates of Darkness*, 5.

confirmation of his failure to unite with the crowd, but moreover as a privileging of that which cannot be absorbed into the whole. In short, *Superfluous Words* speaks not to a total history, but instead a history fragmented with "extra" subjective possibilities such as his own.

Qu's notion of the superfluous was not a sudden bemoaning realization of fecklessness before an untimely death that he included in his final testimony from prison, but a current of thought utilized throughout his literary and political career in multiple contexts. As a student of the National Institute of Russian Language (*Guoli Ewen zhuanxiu guan* 國立俄文專修館) beginning in 1917 in Beijing, Qu's initial forays into literary studies included the study of the nineteenth century masters of Russian fiction, in particular Pushkin, Gogol, Turgenev, Dostoyevsky, and Tolstoy.[59] The tradition of the figure of the superfluous man in nineteenth-century Russian literature comprises a range of characters, such as the Byronic rebel, cosmopolitan dandy, frustrated bureaucrat, and heroic intellectual. Despite the variety of interpretive lenses that have been applied to the superfluous man, the literary power of the notion is located in the character's uncertain yearning to belong, or as literary critic Frank Seeley writes, "the drama of an intelligentsia lies in its struggles to break out of its isolation, which means to achieve organic reunion with its own people and, by bridging the outer gulf which divides it from them, to heal also the inner rift which festers and aches in its soul."[60] Though the talented, but ultimately ineffectual character of the superfluous man (most often, like Qu,

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[59] Qu's entrance into the Russian Language Institute was the result of both an enthusiasm for literary and language studies, and the fact that the Institute did not charge tuition. His application to study Chinese literature at Peking University (*Beijing daxue* 北京大學) was rejected that year.

[60] Seeley, Frank F. "The Heyday of the 'Superfluous Man.'" *From the Heyday of the Superfluous Man to Chekhov: Essays on 19th-Century Russian Literature*. Nottingham: Astra Press, 1994. 3.

from an aristocratic background) may hold ideals or even wish for social change, his personal weakness and alienation from society prevent his success. Qu, one of the earliest and most accomplished translators of modern Russian literature in China, often argued for taking these writers as models for the China's own New Culture Movement (*xin wenhua yundong* 新文化運動), emphasizing the similarity of their respective historical circumstances, as well as the significant role that literature played in transforming Russian society.[61] In Qu's study of Russian literature, which he continued throughout his life,[62] he focuses less on the inevitable failure of the superfluous man to change society and instead on these characters' vital concern for their nation, thus interpreting their superfluity as a technique of social critique. Being a "superfluous" intellectual, in this way, serves both as a model (as a way of using critical distance to assess China's national crisis), and as a warning (as a way of avoiding utter social redundancy).

Seen through this figure of the superfluous man, Qu's entry into radical politics during the heady years of the burgeoning New Culture Movement is already split along similar lines between the individual and collective: his pursuit of individual salvation through Buddhism as a youth was overtaken by the historical demand to "save China" in

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[61] See Ng, Mau-sang. *The Russian Hero in Modern Chinese Fiction*. Hong Kong: The Chinese University of Hong Kong Press, 1988. 31-48. Also, Paul Pickowicz writes how the young Qu Qiubai was heavily influenced by the Russian materialist view of the relationship between art and society, according to which "artistic culture is not an autonomous realm: there is an organic relationship between art and society." See Pickowicz, Paul G. *Marxist Literary Thought in China: The Influence of Ch'ü Ch'iu-pai*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981. 27-33 (here 30).

[62] Ellen Widmer argues Qu's interest in nineteenth century Russian literature is intimately connected with his concerns for the proletariat and, moreover, traces his problematic appreciation for it through his strategy of literary proletarianization. See Widmer, Ellen. "Qu Qiubai and Russian Literature." In *Modern Chinese Literature in the May Fourth Era*. Ed. Merle Goldman. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1977. 103-125.

the late 1910s, culminating in actions such as his participation in the May Fourth demonstrations in 1919 and involvement in the Marxist Research Society (*Makesi xueshuo yanjiuhui* 馬克斯學說研究會) at Peking University around the same time.[63] He notes in *Journey to the Land of Hunger*, written in 1920 (before his rigorous study of Marxist theory), that this "dual outlook on life" (*er yuan de renshengguan* 二元的人生觀), consisting of his "worldly" (*shijian de* 世間的) responsibilities of preparing for a career in addition to his "otherworldly (*chu shijian* 出世間) endeavors "to save China by means of culture 做以文化救中國的功夫," is calibrated through one overriding issue: "the question of the relationship between people 人與人之關係的疑問."[64] For Qu, the question of social galvanization, in particular through the mode of literary production, propels his inquiry into the crowd vis-à-vis the duality of his individual subjectivity.

Journey to the Land of Hunger, commissioned by the Beijing newspaper *Morning Post* (*Chen bao* 晨報), records Qu's trip from Beijing through northeast China and Siberia to Moscow. As noted above, its value as a travel memoir is overshadowed by the chronicling of Qu's vivid moods and expressions of self, and not, as one might expect, as an espousal of the recent success of the Russian Revolution. T.A. Hsia notes there is not a "single memorable scene of mass movement which would have justified his illusions about the Communist revolution," and comments in fact that the most revealing aspect of the short work is its "incongruity": "[I]t is an ironic comment on the cultural scene of

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[63] Qu led the delegation from the Russian Language Institute from Tiananmen Square and participated in the burning of the house of Cao Rulin 曹汝霖, a pro-Japanese official. He was arrested a month later and spent several days jailed for his actions. See Paul Pickowicz, *Marxist Literary Thought*, 19-20. Jamie Greenbaum also notes that this sort of political action would irrevocably change Qu, writing, "From being an occasional political thinker, he became ... a *participant*." See Greenbaum, Jamie. *Qu Qiubai* Superfluous Words. Canberra: Pandanus Books, 2006. 14.

[64] Qu Qiubai 瞿秋白. "E xiang jicheng 餓鄉紀程." *Qu Qiubai wenji*, Vol. 1, 22.

China in the early twenties that Ch'ü's eulogy of Soviet Russia … should be overladen with sighs of personal grief."[65] Nonetheless, Qu's concern with discovering the social forces that can lead to cultural revolution and national rejuvenation remain at the forefront of his journey.

In *Journey to the Land of Hunger*, Qu ascribes the social forces that precipitated the Russian Revolution to a transcendental, spontaneous swell of collective energy, which he terms, utilizing Buddhist terminology, as a "mind sea" (*xinhai* 心海). His reluctance to attribute social change to material forces suggests the deficiency of the training in Marxist theory that would later form the basis of his worldview, yet also indicates Qu's enthusiasm to articulate a lyrical dynamic at work between "mass psychology" (*qunzhong xinli* 群眾心理) and real, material change.[66] He writes,

> Human history throughout the centuries is but a series of visions, one nightmare quickly succeeded by another, which appear in one's consciousness as in the moment when the blood is rushing to the heart. Therefore we cannot have more than a faint impression of them. Social phenomena, with all their endless involvements and myriad reflections, cannot also but leave faint traces, because they are only so many undulations of the Mind's waves. […] The mind sea is ever in motion and the mind's waves heave and roll in every possible manner. They compose the phantasmagoric world of ours. The closer we are to waking, the more real, and probably also the more terrible, the dreams appear. Since the Mind sea is all-pervasive, so the world is in one dream; but since the Mind's waves rise and fall in all grotesque shapes, the starlight they catch glitters with a brilliance that is different from here to there. 幾世紀幾千年的史籍，正像心血如潮，一剎那間已現重重的噩夢，印象稀微，何獨不因於此。人類社會的現象縈迴映帶，影響依微，也不過起伏震盪於此心波。 […] 心海心波的浪

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[65] Tsi-an Hsia, *The Gates of Darkness*, 25-27.

[66] Qu's use of the term (popularized through the Chinese translation of Gustave Le Bon's famous text) indicates he was ahead of the curve in terms of application of Western scientific concepts, but his interpretation adheres to affective categories of analysis: "The history of social evolution is the record of psychological changes in society. It is a 'shadow' indicating the fluctuations of emotions and feelings. It is not a learned record of social ideology and social teachings. It is not a general formula or chart that, with the aid of reason, it would be possible to trace and discuss. Fundamentally, mass psychology does not possess the consciousness of reason in expressing itself that individual psychology has. 社會進化史是社會心理變遷的記錄，就是只顯露情感感覺流動的 '陰影'；他不是社會思想，社會學說的學案，並無理性分別計較試驗的公式圖表，本來群眾心理還非如個心理性意識作用的表現。" See Qu Qiubai, "E xiang jicheng," 85. English in Paul G. Pickowicz, *Marxist Literary Thought in China*, 40. Translation modified.

> 勢演成万象，錯構夢影。醒時愈近，夢象愈真，亦許夢境愈惡。心海普通圓滿，心波各趁奇勢；所以宇宙同夢，而星神各自炫耀他自己的光彩。[67]

Although Qu's efforts here to relate the Buddhist concepts of the "Mind sea" and the "Mind's waves" to the advance of a dreamlike history discloses his dependence on metaphysical classifications, the theory of history presented here resonates with his final historical evaluation presented in *Superfluous Words*, in which he judges his own role in the Communist revolution to be a "historical misunderstanding" (*lishi de wuhui* 曆史的誤會). Conflating the personal, dreamlike, waves of the Mind and the epic, collective vision of history, Qu sees this typically oppositional tension through the lens of the other.

A further resonance between his early writings and his final work is found in the thirty-second section of *History of the Heart in the Red Capital*. In this section, written from the Moscow hospital where he was convalescing after an attack of tuberculosis and entitled "China's 'Superfluous Man'" (Zhongguo zhi 'duoyu de ren' 中國之《多餘的人》)," Qu regards his life, limited as it is by his physical frailty and the crippling torment of loneliness, as caught in a "whirlpool" (*xuanwo* 旋渦) of superfluity at the junction between romanticism and realism. "I used to regard myself as exceptional," he writes,

> but looking back, can I find anything special about me? How ridiculous! I should identify with the masses. 'What indeed can you do? Isn't it better to identify with the masses?' Reason has reached a conclusion, but the affective force is too great, so what can be done? 自己也會以為不是尋常人，回頭看一看，又有什麼特異，可笑可笑. 應當同於庸眾。"你究竟能做什麼，不如同於庸眾的好。" 理智的結論如此；情性的傾向卻很遠大，又怎樣呢？[68]

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[67] Qu Qiubai, "E xiang jicheng," 90-91. English from Tsi-an Hsia, *The Gates of Darkness*, 23-24. Translation slightly modified.

[68] Qu Qiubai 瞿秋白. "Chi du xin shi 赤都心史." *Qu Qiubai wenji*, Vol.1, 171. English in Tsi-an Hsia, *The Gates of Darkness*, 40. Translation modified.

Qu's dualistic nature, framed as a conversation taking place within his own psyche, is rendered superfluous by its own ambivalent posturing between the epic, historical basis of realism and reason, and his own lyrical subjectivity that proves as intractable as his disease.

Following Qu's return to China in January 1923, he immediately became active in the Communist Party, which he joined through his work as an interpreter at political meetings while in Moscow (he was elected to the Central Committee in June at the age of 24), as well as the Shanghai literary scene, joining the Literary Research Association (*Wenxue yanjiu hui* 文學研究會), a group dedicated to the scientific application of literature and poetry in order to objectively study contemporary humanity (Qu, however, also maintained cordial relations with members of the more romantic Creation Society [*Chuangzao she* 創造社], in particular Guo Moruo 郭沫若). Now fully immersed in Marxism, Qu advanced the notion of proletarian literature in his introductions of Soviet literary theory, distinguishing himself from the bourgeois perspectives of both of the feuding literary camps, whether apolitical or humanist. Qu's efforts, however, were hampered by both his own naïveté concerning the range of Marxist literary thought, as well as the unreceptivity of the Shanghai cultural scene in the early 1920s. Pickowicz notes insightfully that Qu's failure to find an audience for his theories would be integrated into his critique of the May Fourth Movement in later years: "It is important, therefore, to see the introduction of Marxist literary thought not as an exotic and alien trend in early May Fourth literary and intellectual history, but as a trend that falls

squarely *within* the May Fourth tradition."[69] Later in the decade, in particular after the failed urban uprisings of 1927 (launched under Qu's leadership of the Party and later condemned as "blind adventurism" [*mangdongzhuyi* 盲動主義]), an urgent sense of national crisis would pervade the literary scene and the debate over the revolutionary role of the writer would intensify.

Qu's contributions to a Chinese Marxist aesthetic culminate most forcefully in his work that deals with this specific issue of the position of the writer and intellectual in times of revolution. Like Lu Xun in his speech to the Whampoa Military Academy, Qu views the lingering May Fourth values among the intelligentsia class as the epitome of fecklessness. The writers he attacked as "Europeanized" (*Ouhua de* 歐化的) intellectuals were, like Xu Zhimo 徐志摩 and Hu Shi 胡適, active participants in the literary revolution, yet refused to abandon their elitist conceit as intellectuals and acknowledge the revolutionary vanguard of the proletariat. For Qu, the sudden increase in the ranks of the revolutionary writers in the wake of political setbacks in 1927 and 1928 only exacerbated this contradiction among the cultural left wing. Tellingly, one of his most favored terms for denigrating this kind of "Europeanized" writer was "superfluous," indicating an intellectual who seeks the individual aesthetic pleasure in the spectacle of revolution without fully joining the mass movement. Most scathing was his pointed criticism of the May Fourth Movement, which "simply provided the Europeanized gentry with yet another sumptuous banquet to satisfy their new tastes while the laboring people were still starving. 只是替歐化的紳士換了胃口的魚翅酒席，勞動民眾是沒有福氣吃

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[69] Paul G. Pickowicz, *Marxist Literary Thought in China*, 79. Also see Ellen Widmer, "Qu Qiubai and Russian Literature," 117-118.

的。”[70] Qu's sharp analysis of modern Chinese literary history and calls for a "proletarian May Fourth" (*wuchang jieji de Wusi* 無產階級的五四) suggest that his Marxist perspective had rectified his previous concerns of his own inability to identify with the masses.[71] Unlike *Journey to the Land of Hunger* and *History of the Heart in the Red Capital*, the tone of Qu's *zawen* essays is bitingly critical and directed outward, toward assessing the cultural scene, rather than inwardly to own psychology. Many of his ideas concerned with asserting the leadership role of the proletariat and cultural revolution would play a significant role in the development of the Chinese Revolution after his demise. His elevation of the aesthetic discourse to the forefront of revolutionary activity exerted a strong influence on Mao Zedong's 毛澤東 thought, who, unlike Qu, would wield it in the service of forcefully reforming the "reactionary" elements in writers' conceptions of art.

The problem Qu shrewdly identifies in his literary criticism is revolutionary writers' self-imposed segregation from the masses. According to Qu, the legacy of the May Fourth movement in literature was not one of proletarianization — spreading ideas of modern culture, politics of popular sovereignty, and most importantly, literacy to the rural population of China — but inflating elitist sensibilities and widening divergence from the masses. In the appropriately titled essay "Who's 'We'?" ("Women" shi shei?

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[70] Qu Qiubai 瞿秋白. "Dazhong wenyi de wenti 大眾文藝的問題." *Qu Qiubai wenji*, Vol. 2, 885. English in Paul G. Pickowicz, *Modern Chinese Literary Thought*, 419.

[71] Liu Kang, reading of Qu's aesthetic notion next to Edward Said and Antonio Gramsci, notes an irony in Qu's unrelenting criticism of the "Europeanization" of May Fourth Movement, given his own participation in it as literary figure and translator: "While he was sharply critical of the flexible positionality of the May Fourth intellectuals, Qu focused on subjective and cultural factors in the class identity of intellectuals, contradicting his own Marxist class analysis based primarily on political and economic affiliations. See Liu Kang, *Marxism and Aesthetics*, 66.

“我們”是誰？), written in 1932 during his tenure in the League, he criticizes those “revolutionary intellectuals” (*geming de zhishifenzi* 革命的智識分子) who advocate the “massification” (*dazhonghua* 大眾化) of art and literature, but refuse to “‘go to the masses and learn’” (‘*xiang dazhong qu xuexi*’ ‘向大眾去學習’).[72] The most daunting obstacle to massification is therefore “the fact that the majority of revolutionary writers and ‘literary youth‘ stand *outside* the masses, intent on positioning themselves *above* the masses so as to instruct the masses. 這就是革命的文學家和‘文學青年’大半還站在大眾之外，企圖站在大眾之上去教訓大眾。”[73] The writers who seek to lift up the masses so that they will be able to comprehend the writers’ work are mistaken in their outlook; the task of “the people’s literary revolution” (*qunzhong wenxue geming* 群眾文學革命), Qu argues, is to

> makes use of the the vernacular language spoken by Chinese today (the simplest, most genuine vernacular language), it should create reading material for the vast masses, reach out to the districts in which the poor live, constantly criticize all reactionary popular literature and art, fiercely advance the struggle in opposition to reactionary merchant-gentry consciousness, develop worker-peasant-soldier correspondence movements, and foster working class writers ... 應當用現代的中國的語文，而且是最淺近的真正白話文，創造廣大的群眾讀物，銷行到廣大的貧民區域，經常不斷的批判一切反動的大眾 文藝，進行猛烈的反對紳商階級的反動意識的鬥爭，發展工農兵士的通信運動，培養工人作……[74]

Qu’s rhetoric here foreshadows Mao Zedong in both style and substance; the seemingly sensible, grounded solutions he proposes are meant to solve practical, political problems. Left unmentioned (as Pickowicz points out) are the Russian models he had previously championed.[75] Literary and artistic massification, for Qu, may also be regarded,

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[72] Qu Qiubai. “‘Women’ shi shei? ‘我們’是誰？” *Qu Qiubai wenji*, Vol. 1， 486. The quotation marks around the last phrase are in the original, and a common feature of Qu’s writing.

[73] Qu Qiubai, “‘Women’ shi shei?” 487. English in Qu Qiu-bai, “Who’s ‘We’?” 45.

[74] Qu Qiubai, “‘Women’ shi shei?” 488. English in Qu Qiu-bai, “Who’s ‘We’?” 46.

[75] Pickowicz, Paul G. “Introduction to Qu Qiu-bai’s ‘Who’s “We”?’ and ‘The Question of Popular Literature and Art.” *Revolutionary Literature in China: An Anthology*. White Plains, M.E. Sharpe, 1976. 45.

therefore, as a solution to the intensely personal problem of breaking through the impasse of superfluity.

After being forced to hide out in Shanghai for several years (often receiving shelter from Lu Xun), Qu was dispatched to the Jiangxi Soviet in early 1934 to serve as Commissar of Education. His reentry into political service, dangerous and lonely as it was, nonetheless provided Qu with the opportunity to put his theories on proletarian revolutionary literature and language reform into practice.[76] His labors to increase literacy among the peasants and direct cultural organizations comprise an effort to prove, perhaps as much to himself as his intellectual colleagues, that a popular cultural movement could succeed; however, as Pickowicz points out, the Jiangxi movement also foreshadowed the steep price literary intellectuals would have to pay for their role in the creation of the new society. For his part, Qu did not address this issue directly in his writing, but would admit frankly about one year later in *Superfluous Words* that there is in fact no "common language" (*gongtong de yuyan* 共同的語言) between himself and the masses in Jiangxi.[77]

Qu Qiubai was captured by KMT forces in Fujian province in February, 1935, attempting to make his way to Yongding in southwest Fujian, where safe transport to Hong Kong or Shanghai could be arranged. He was executed in Changting in June at the age of thirty-six. Over the course of five days in May of that year, he composed the remarkable and confounding essay *Superfluous Words*, in which he fully admits to, and

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[76] It should be noted that Qu's writings on the issue of language and in particular the romanization of Chinese characters are extensive, filling a whole volume (Volume 3) of the 1954 edition of his *Collected Writings*. Notably, "Superfluous Words" is not included in this collection.

[77] Qu Qiubai, "Duoyu de hua," 717.

even assertively declares, his own superfluity. Seriously ill and under no illusions of his impending fate, Qu discovered a new dimension of meaning in the word "superfluous," a discomfiting idea which had interested him for years. In Chinese, the word *duoyu* signifies a remainder or surplus leftover from the multitude, and it is likely that a similar feeling of being prematurely excluded from historical change penetrated his thoughts while in prison. His deteriorating health having prevented him from joining the Red Army on their retreat from Jiangxi (in what was to become the legendary Long March [*Changzheng* 長征]),[78] Qu was literally the surplus remainder that did not belong to the course of epic history; "Now that I have been completely divested of my battle gear and pulled out from the ranks," he writes in the preface statement, "all that remains is myself. 現在我已經完全被解除了武裝，被拉出了隊伍，只剩得我自己了。"[79] *Superfluous Words*, however, is not merely an entreatment of humility in the long-standing tradition of Chinese "incidental" writing, nor was it composed as a final lamentation of his pitiable circumstances. Moreover, it does not signify any sort of meaningful refutation of his Communist convictions.[80] As a final testimony, this short piece assesses Qu's psychology with brutal and candid honesty, but also serves as a release for a repressed lyrical mode of expression:

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[78] There is some debate concerning the circumstances that led to the decision to leave Qu behind. It seems likely that some long-seated personal animosity toward him within the CCP leadership played some role. For his part, Mao is said to have advocated for including Qu, and, after he had assumed the leadership along the Long March, criticized those leaders who did not allow him to accompany them. See Jamie Greenbaum, *Qu Qiubai* Superfluous Words, 52-53 fn166.

[79] Qu Qiubai, "Duoyu de hua," 694. English in Jamie Greenbaum, *Qu Qiubai* Superfluous Words, 140. Translation slightly modified.

[80] Jamie Greenbaum notes a sense of irony in Qu's declaration of willingness to submit to "the impartial judgement of history" (*lishi de zui gongkai de caipan* 历史的最公開的裁判) and argues that in order to get the KMT to let the text to be published, Qu most likely used a degree of pretense. See Jamie Greenbaum, *Qu Qiubai* Superfluous Words, 69.

> In my heart I have an irresistible impulse and need to speak the words of my innermost being, to look deep inside myself to find what I really am. I cannot help but give voice to the petit-bourgeois intellectuals' disposition to 'self analysis' that the Bolsheviks so disliked. 心上有不能自己的沖動和需要：説一説內心的話，徹底暴露內心的真相。布爾塞維克所討厭的小布爾喬亞（資產階級）智識者的"自我分析"的脾气，不能夠不發作了。[81]

Rather than grieve over his impending demise, Qu affirmatively embraces his superfluity and, in doing so, complicates our understanding of the role of the subject, now fragmented and redundant, in revolutionary history.

Two related aspects of Qu's complex notion of superfluity appear in *Superfluous Words*. The first, mentioned above, relates to his notion of history. Qu factually recounts his life after his departure from his home in the second section, titled "A Historical Misunderstanding," yet reveals that in fact he never had much political ambition. In his study of Russian he fell into reading Marxist theory, went to Russia, and eventually assuming the post of leadership of the CCP. "In my own assessment," he writes,

> that a man with my sort of personality, ability, and education, should become the leader of the CCP really is a 'historical misunderstanding'. I was just a dilettantish 'literatus' after all. All along I have been a 'literatus who has not discarded any of his old habits'. 我自己忖度著，像我這樣的性格才能學識，當中國共產黨的領袖確實是一個"曆史的誤會"。我本只是一個半吊子的"文人"而已，直到最後還是"文人結習未除"的。[82]

Qu's reading of the trajectory of his career as a mistake certainly does not represent the historical certainty that determinist Marxist ideology projects. Rather, the idea of history he presents possesses no vital, driving force leading it, nor is the progress toward a Socialist given any thought. Instead, in Qu's final outlook, history consists of little more than a series of coincidences and accidents, yet continues to move forward in spite of these mishaps. It is worth recalling here Walter Benjamin's version of a materialist historiography, symbolized in the image of the angel of history: "Where we perceive a

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[81] Qu Qiubai, "Duoyu de hua," 694. English in Jamie Greenbaum, *Qu Qiubai* Superfluous Words, 140.

[82] Qu Qiubai, "Duoyu de hua," 699. English in Jamie Greenbaum, *Qu Qiubai* Superfluous Words, 147. Translation modified.

chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise ..."[83] In Benjamin's formulation, the fragments and debris of history can no longer be repaired into a cohesive whole; Qu's superfluity in this framework is likewise a fracture. How to reconcile his individual life with the progress of epic history, the mantle of which is carried by the proletariat and which holds the promise of wholeness, becomes a tremendous source of both melancholy and literary inspiration.

Qu's ability to stand outside the course of history also allows him to fully accept its judgment. He writes near the end of the essay, "Although I am in jail and could easily assume an impassioned pose as I go to my death, I dare not do so. History cannot and should not be cheated. 虽然我现在已经因在监狱里，雖然我现在很密易装腔做势慷慨激昂而死，可是我不敢这样做。历史是 不能够，也不应当欺骗的。"[84] What is at issue here is history as a form of narration; Qu, as both the subjective narrator of his personal history as well as the object of historical misunderstanding, writes from the perspective of a moment cut off from the massive sweep of history's trajectory, consequently "the lifework is preserved in this work and at the same time canceled."[85] In this way, Qu is able to redeem his literary life by asserting his historical misapprehension. The superfluous is both the detritus left behind by the "storm" of progress, as well as that

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[83] Benjamin, Walter. "Theses on the Philosophy of History." *Illuminations*. Trans. Harry Zohn. New York: Schocken Books, 1978. 257-258.

[84] Qu Qiubai, "Duoyu de hua," 720. English in Jamie Greenbaum, *Qu Qiubai* Superfluous Words, 169.

[85] Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," 263.

which is retrieved from the "homogenous, empty time" of the revolutionary continuum of history.

Secondly, Qu's insistence on identifying as a *wenren*, or literatus, further complicates his notion of the superfluous. In the section of titled "A Literaus," Qu charges that "in fact, the so-called 'literatus' is really a character of no use whatsoever. 的確，"文人" 正是無所用之的人物。and is also outside the current of history, "an "artifact" from the Chinese middle-ages — and a very bad legacy. 是中國中世紀的殘餘和"遺產嘆——份很壞的遺產。"[86] Here, Qu's choice of words implies that, rather than this type of character is a remnant of the past (*yichan* 遺產), rather than a product of the proletarian communion with history (*gongchan* 共產). As Pickowicz points out, the tone of his critique does not differ significantly from his seething resentment toward those intellectuals who argued for a transcendent realm of cultural production, but now "he places himself squarely in their category."[87] Qu even goes so far as characterize his own writings on literature as "very confused and half-baked. 駁雜得很，也是一知半解的。"[88] Despite his self-loathing, however, his acceptance of the ignominious title of *wenren* suggests a correspondence between the superfluous engagement with literature and art and, as sketched above, a historically outsider status. That is, by declaring his uselessness in explicitly literary terms, Qu removes himself from the current of linear

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[86] Qu Qiubai, "Duoyu de hua," 712-713. English in Jamie Greenbaum, *Qu Qiubai* Superfluous Words, 162. Translation modified.

[87] Paul G. Pickowicz, *Marxist Literary Thought in China*, 216.

[88] Qu Qiubai, "Duoyu de hua," 718. English in Jamie Greenbaum, *Qu Qiubai* Superfluous Words, 167.

history that the proletariat mass carries forward.[89] In some ways, Qu's retreat into the traditional Chinese category of *wenren* recalls Lu Xun's declaration that "During a great revolution, literature disappears and there is silence, for everyone is swept up in the tide of revolution and turns from shouting to action. 到了大革命的時代，文學沒有了，沒有聲音了，因為大家受革命潮流的鼓蕩，大家由呼喊而轉入行動。"[90] Likewise, Qu maintains the uselessness of literature in revolutionary times and give value to physical participation and sacrifice over the hollow and ephemeral words of intellectuals. Unlike Lu Xun, however, Qu's claim to superfluity is, in its very textual form, an assertion of a literary subjectivity that, even (or especially) at the end, remains singular and distant from the crowded revolution.

Marston Anderson characterizes the May Fourth literary creed of "a literature of blood and tears" (*xue he lei de wenxue* 血和淚的文學) in terms of the tension that creates "a double sense of fiction as a field for self-expression and for the exploration of constraining influences on the self."[91] The bodily fluids metaphorically represent the new literature's power to affect reality; through the invocation of empathy for the wounded and the suffering of the masses, literature would spur revolutionary action by galvanizing

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[89] At the close of *Superfluous Words*, just before his final farewell, Qu recommends six works of literature, three Russian and three Chinese, for the reader to "re-read" (*zai du yi du* 再讀一讀). Despite his vociferous espousal of revolutionary and proletarian literature since the debates of the late 1920s, none of works that Qu recommends here fall into those categories. The three Russian novels (by Gorky, Turgenev, and Tolstoy) each contain exemplary "superfluous" characters, while the three Chinese works (Lu Xun's *True Story of Ah Q*, Mao Dun's *Vacillation* [Dongyao 動搖], and *Dream of the Red Chamber* [Hongloumeng 紅樓夢] by Cao Xueqin 曹雪芹) arguably develop similar themes of the cultivation of an individual subjectivity in relation to social surroundings.

[90] Lu Xun, "Geming shidai de wenxue 革命時代的文學," 419. English in Lu Hsun, "Literature of a Revolutionary Period," 329.

[91] Marston Anderson, *The Limits of Realism*, 44.

its readers' collective sensibilities. Each of the two writers I discuss in this chapter engage with this discourse of collectivity in intimate, personal ways. Yet they also unsettle its simplistic formulation by constructing singular, literary subjectivities standing in relief to the image of the crowd. For Lu Xun, the repeated motif of the *shizhong* translates "blood and tears" into a spectacle for the crowd's entertainment and consumption. But the author himself is also implicated in this ritual of violence; his persistent use of the *shizhong* motif suggests that his intellectual desire to transform the body politic is based on a similar logic of "public warning." His critical dissection of the alienated, impotent intellectual in regard to the crowd image simultaneously suggests that his fascination with the crowd image is a capitulation to the bloodlust innate in the crowd. Qu Qiubai's writing deals intimately with this same conundrum of releasing the intimate and personal through literature's emotive and galvanizing capacities, and simultaneously works toward a literature that absorbs the individual so completely that it becomes the possession of the masses. However, by tracing the subtle discourse of the superfluous in his writing, we can discern another dimension to his literary imagination. *Superfluous Words* transforms his own bodily demise into mere byproducts of history; the physical form may be vanquished in blood and tears, but these "extra" words are what remains as remnants.

Lu Xun and Qu Qiubai, in the end, are self-consciously aware of the alienated singularity that these themes of public execution and historical superfluity suggest for the modern Chinese intellectuals and writers, eerily anticipating the violence and persecution faced by many more cultural figures in the decades that followed. But we may take some

consolation in the bond of a literary fellowship that they forged with each other. In 1933, Lu Xun inscribed the following couplet for Qu Qiubai:

> If we can find one true friend in life that enough; 人生得一知己足矣
> We look at this world with the one same mind. 斯世當以同懷視之[92]

Though they may each stand outside the crowd, the union of shared literary purpose and practice becomes a way of making up for it.

In this chapter I have outlined the role of the image of the crowd in two significant, and highly individual, intellectuals of modern China, Lu Xun and Qu Qiubai. In each of these writers, their singular subjectivities are informed in different ways by the idea of crowd, either as a problematic site of disconcerting visual exposure, or as an abstract, sublime notion of revolutionary wholeness. For Lu Xun, his repeated motif of *shizhong*, or public warning, constitutes a mode of engagement with the spectator crowd; acutely aware of the impossibility of communication with the crowd, he is left only to exhibit it. For Qu Qiubai, his intensely personal subjectivity renders him, in the end, a superfluous figure left on the outside of movement of history, thereby bringing into question the nature of such an ideologically determined historical trajectory. For each, the collective crowd demarcates the limit of literary and historical representation.

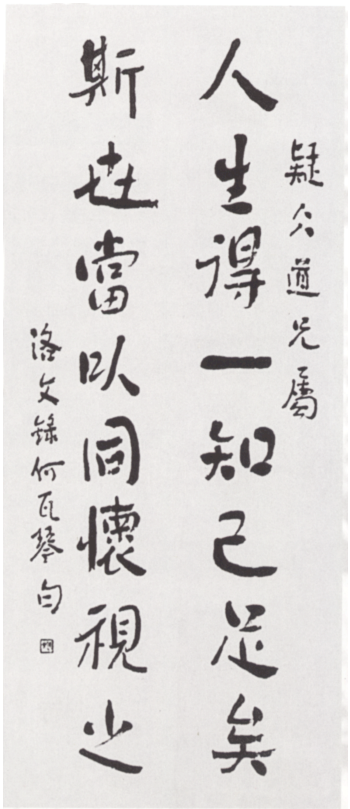

Fig. 1.1 Couplet inscribed for Qu Qiubai by Lu Xun, 1933 (*Lu Xun shigao* 鲁迅诗稿. Shanghai: Shanghai renmin meishu chubanshe, 1991. 82.).

[92] Composed by the Qing scholar He Waqin 何瓦琴. See Lu Xun. "He Waqin ju: Zeng Qu Qiubai 何瓦琴句：赠瞿秋白." (A Couplet by He Waqin: Presented to Qu Qiubai). *Lu Xun shigao* 鲁迅诗稿. Shanghai: Shanghai renmin meishu chubanshe, 1991. 82.

CHAPTER TWO
CROWDS FROM HELL:
VIOLENCE, ABJECTION, AND HAUNTING IN THE MASSIFICATION OF FICTION OF THE LATE 1920S AND EARLY 1930S

Introduction: Orgy of Death

At the close of Chapter One I showed how Lu Xun and Qu Qiubai's literary engagements with the crowd can also reframe our outlook on the revolutionary ambition to create "a literature of blood and tears." A commitment to this corporeality in literary practice means not only the depiction of suffering bodies and class struggle in fiction, but also entails a concurrent aim to make the practice of literature a collective endeavor. In other words, the lesson to be learned from literature's "blood and tears" is both to empathize with the suffering masses, and be incited into revolutionary action together with them. In Chapter One, I read the self-construction of the intellectual in the work of Lu Xun and Qu Qiubai as necessarily inseparable from their means of representing the crowd; the socially transformative role of literature depends on the monadic writer overcoming their singularity in identification with the masses. In this chapter, I change focus away from the figure of the writer standing in relief to the image of the crowd and instead discuss a few of the attempts to resolve this dilemma through the "massification" (*dazhonghua* 大眾化) of literature. The stories examined here each portray the crowd as the starting point of the revolutionary collective they envision, but these crowds are repeatedly identified with violence, catastrophe, and death. The "blood and tears" of writing for the masses provoke more than just revolutionary sentiment, but also conjure a haunting image of the revolutionary crowd's double, the crowd of the dead.

Dealing with these issues of how to represent the crowd and effect a collective, revolutionary subjectivity among readers of fiction became a major preoccupation of socially-engaged fiction writers in China during the late 1920s and 1930s. The imperative to imagine and depict the crowd as a positive, righteous force with the potential to transform China intensified under an unrelenting storm of national and political crises, including the May 30th Incident (*wusa can'an* 五卅慘案) of 1925 in Shanghai, in which foreign police fired upon labor and student demonstrators, Chiang Kai-Shek's (Jiang Jieshi 蔣介石) violent initiation of White Terror campaigns aimed at violently purging Communists from Nationalist areas with the Shanghai Massacre on April 12, 1927 (*si yi'er qingdang* 四 • 一二清黨), the failed urban uprisings of 1927 and 1928, the ongoing campaign against the warlords, and the gradual encroachment on Chinese territory by Japan that led to full-scale invasion in 1937, in addition to catastrophic natural disasters, famines, and refugee crises. The frequent, massive loss of life underscores the urgency of the task accorded to literature, which, for progressive and revolutionary writers, was situated at the vanguard in the campaign for national salvation.

Revolutionary literature calls for imagining and representing the masses within a (realist) narrative as "coming-into-being," possessing a unity formed not only through representing shared suffering and common sacrifice, but also by provoking popular resentment and the shared desire for vengeance. The crowd image in revolutionary literature in general serves as a gesture to the bonds (cultural, ethnic, national, and political) forged in hardship and loss, and frequently the culmination of generations of struggle. This substantive concern for the masses in fiction ideally passes on not just its

empathetic qualities to the reader, but will also engender the very impulse to make the revolution collective, "to take literature as the rightful possession of the masses, 文艺应该是大众的东西，" in the words of Yu Dafu 郁達夫.[1] That is, the "massification" of literature means not just the practical concerns of using straightforward and natural language, realist and accessible storylines, and ideological themes of revolutionary action, but also instilling a sense of collectivity in the reading subject through the literary practice. Crowds grow out from the pages and into the streets. Rather than literature's role in mediating the superfluousness of the intellectual in revolutionary times and their desire to identify with the masses (as in the case of Lu Xun and Qu Qiubai), this chapter focuses on certain works' methods of incitement to the crowd; rather than superfluity, this is a question of excess.

Marston Anderson succinctly summarizes the numerous and often contradictory set of aspirations and limitations for "mass literature" (*dazhong wenxue* 大眾文學) illustrates the dilemma faced by revolutionary writers of the late 1920s and early 1930s:

> Literature was to reflect and describe reality but also to direct and propel reality. Literature was to be the subjective expression of the masses' class interest but was also to be an active force in organizing the masses and in systematizing their worldview. Literature was to stand at the level of the masses but was at the same time to raise their cultural level. Literature was to constitute the author's objective observation of and research into reality but only from the perspective of a correct worldview, specifically that of the workers and peasant.[2]

The value of literature in these formulations lies in its abilities to create active, collective readers out of the passive, individual act of reading. Yet, the techniques of "blood and tears" that form the basis of the social bond between literature and the masses and which

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[1] Yu Dafu 郁達夫. "*Dazhong wenyi* yiming 大眾文藝譯名." *"Geming wenxue" lunzheng ziliao xuanbian* "革命文學"論爭資料選編 (Selected Materials on the "Revolutionary Literature" Debate). Vol. 2. Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1981. 657. Originally published in the inaugural issue of Yu's magazine *Mass Art* (Dazhong wenyi 大眾文藝), dated September 20, 1928.

[2] Marston Anderson. *The Limits of Realism*, 57.

serves to bridge the oppositional ambitions Anderson lists above, creates a representational dynamic sustained by moments of excess and transgression. The literary production of "blood and tears" that form the basis of the bond between the writing of revolutionary literature and the collectivizing effect it intends to produce constantly threatens to push beyond this simple, reciprocal schema and spill over (or, regress) into what C.T. Hsia has called "hardcore realism," which leaves behind ideological motivations for writing to indulge in the material forms of violence at their most raw and powerful.[3] The stories under examination in this chapter are chosen, therefore, on the ways in which they both seek to bring the masses into being through the depiction of their violent impulses or even brutal extermination. The crowd is expressed as a material manifestation of the masses, but, unlike that abstract, totalizing notion, is continually subject to bloodshed, disorder, and eradication. To put it simply, the annihilation of the crowd becomes a key means to producing the masses.

This representational dynamic also plays on the crowd formation's latent instability as an entity and often volatile means of manifestation. The projective bond that unifies the crowd and magnifies the degree of its engagement is tenuous; the strength a crowd finds in numbers can quickly disintegrate into a chaotic scramble for survival, or be reduced to deafening silence by massive casualty. More precisely, the visualization of wholeness that the crowd compels carries its own double: the specter, and even the anticipation, of its dissolution, extinction, or disappearance. That is, there is already a sacrificial element embedded in the metonymic representation of the crowd, negatively

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[3] Hsia, C.T. "Closing Remarks." *Chinese Fiction from Taiwan: Critical Perspectives*. Ed. Jeanette L. Faurot. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980. 240.

picturing its absence through the its representational means of coming-into-being. Thus, within the active, politically engaged crowds, united under a banner of revolution and sated with the revelation of sublime singularity, we can find a haunting recurrence of sacrifice and martyrdom. In this way, every crowd is always already doubled and every mass bears the possibility of massacre.

This paper will locate some instances of this ghostly doubling of the crowd in modern Chinese literature from the 1920s and 30s and consider their implications on the visions of history and revolution they ostensibly purport. By drawing upon the crowd as both a mode of the literary imagination and a part of the revolutionary agenda, these writings run up against the "limits of realism" to deal with the possibility of collective violence, and furthermore, mass annihilation. Crowds are a symbol of modernity, representing the self-determination and political legitimacy of nations and societies, and yet they simultaneously undermine modernity's claim as the pinnacle of social and material evolution in the constant intimation of potential chaos and the threat of carnivalesque barbarism. In short, crowds can never reconcile the modern, sublime aim of collective wholeness with its own latent impulse for violence.

By focusing on this slippage between these contradictory notions of the crowd, indeed often exhibited side by side with one another, this paper will show how the crowd pushes on these limits of representation — the horrors, depravities, and unspeakable moments of history — and, furthermore, how the crowd's intrinsic momentum toward excess reveals a sinister undercurrent in the narration of history. I contend that these visions of excess through the crowd constitute a strategy of engaging with the

multiplicitous nature of history; that is, the proliferation of representations of violent death, and, more specifically, the "surplus remainder" of the corpses, speaks to both the (over)materiality of history's grisly returns as well the impossibility of rehabilitating history, through representation, into a cohesive unity.

My argument begins with an analysis of Wang Jingzhi's 汪靜之 short story "Human Meat" (Renrou 人肉), written in January 1928. This story relates the efforts of a small village to evade the marauding Taiping rebels in the mid-19th century. Led by one Scholar Wang 汪舉人, the village's initial group efforts to avoid wholesale slaughter at the hand of the "longhairs" (*changmao* 長毛) are successful, but their collective spirit eventually breaks down, and barbarous disorder ensues. As the collective mass disintegrates, the "heap of the dead" grows higher, producing a kind of gruesome double of the initial collective. Moreover, as the piles of corpses satisfy the demands of human nourishment, the cannibalistic excess that sustains Scholar Wang's Confucian ritualism comes to define the historical subject in relation to the slaughtered congregation.

Next, I look at Zhang Tianyi's 張天翼 1932 short story "Hatred" (Chouhen 仇恨). Like "Human Meat," Zhang's short story follows a group of refugees displaced by violent aggression. The crowd in "Hatred," however, follows the opposite trajectory by rejecting the kind of brutal cannibalism exercised in "Human Meat," and instead coalesces into a collective unit over the course of the story. When they encounter wounded soldiers from the military unit responsible for the devastation of their village, the crowd, at first bent on vengeance, shows compassion toward the soldiers and sympathetically eases their suffering. Yet, while this expansion of human empathy also expands the crowd across the

essentially meaningless divisions imposed onto the lower classes, it also validates the call for violent reprisal indicated in the title. More provocatively is how this call is simultaneously directed toward and springs from the already-deceased; lineage, conceived as a host of the dead, exerts a second kind of crowd compulsion, as both the object of the crowd's vengeful desire as well as the justification for its own existence.

Thirdly, I use Wu Zuxiang's 1933 story "Eighteen Hundred Piculs" (Yi qian ba bai dan 一千八百擔) to further illustrate the multiplicity of crowds being created through the call for massification. In "Eighteen Hundred Piculs," the crowd of starving tenant farmers that invade the Song family ancestral temple is not revealed until the very end of the story. The tension that slowly builds throughout sets up a competition between the self-serving interests of the various members of the clan elders as the try to decide what use to put their last remaining stash of rice, as well as the ghostly loom the ancestors. Unlike Zhang Tianyi's evocation of lineage through the curses of an old man, Wu Zuxiang's concern with the Song family ancestors questions the degree to which the tenant riot that closes "Eighteen Hundred Piculs" is a modern, revolutionary moment, or merely the latest iteration of a premodern form of popular carnival.

Although these stories each elicit different reactions, I think their respective use of images of multiplicity, profusion, and mass deserve comparison. In each, the forces of violence and death seek to control or limit the crowd's power, often in an encounter with what I call am calling the "death crowd." More importantly, each story recognizes how the dynamics of crowd creation are sustained by its complex relation to the spectral realm of the host of the dead. Through this connection, we can perceive an unnerving

"hauntology" at work in the crowd imagination, as well as in its literary counterpart, in which the crowd simultaneously represents the sublime manifestation of the collective unity that can save the Chinese nation, as well as an invisible, primal, and even demonic forces from the past that prevent China from achieving sovereignty and modernity. In other words, the crowd in these stories does more than mark the boundaries of the self, but also acts as a mediator between the individual and history; if modern historical awareness is to be achieved on a national scale, it must materialize through this collective prism. As this analogy implies, however, the kind of mediation produced by the prism fragments and distorts, shattering and warping history across a spectrum of visibility and invisibility, or past and present. The aim of literary massification, from this perspective, involves more than formal or technical renovations, but also includes an engagement with these visceral and haunting forces.

This temporal mutability discerned in the representation of the crowd in these stories recalls what Derrida (via Shakespeare) famously calls "time out of joint,"[4] producing the constant threat of a spectral conjuration: "The living present is scarcely as self-sufficient as it claims to be; that we would do well not to count on its density and solidity."[5] Simply put, the crowd in these stories is evoked as both the site of revolutionary change, as well as a powerful reminder (remainder) of the Chinese legacy of catastrophic, mass violence and death. As such, the tenuous faith invested into the crowd recalls, at the level of representation, its deceased historical double. As a result,

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[4] Derrida, Jacques. *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*. Trans. Peggy Kamuf. New York: Routledge, 1994. 77-78.

[5] Jameson, Frederic. "Marx's Purloined Letter." *Ghostly Demarcations: A Symposium on Jacque Derrida's* Specters of Marx. Ed. Michael Sprinker. New York: Verso, 1999. 26-67.

the death crowd at work here indicates a host of unresolved tensions between history and fiction, collective action and the narrative subject, and violence and representation.

As mentioned above, writing that engages with revolutionary aesthetics is particularly interested in a representation of the crowd that exhibits its coming-into-being, particularly through violent means. Many writers who became politically engaged in the second half of the 1920s and into the 1930s sought to contribute to the revolution with their fictional production, a task that required for many efforts to reify their posture towards the Chinese masses, as well as to totalize their literary practice in terms of the collective. Setting the masses on the path toward historical enlightenment corresponds with the amplification of the realist discourse of literary representation. Marston Anderson concludes his seminal work on the representational and historical dilemmas of realist fiction in China's revolutionary period with the chapter "Beyond Realism: The Eruption of the Crowd." Anderson's closing statement positions the representation of the crowd at these "limits of realism," contending that "from the start realists recognized certain limitations to this new authorial ego — both in its relationship with the audience, the 'you' to whom a fictional work is addressed, and in its power to benefit the disenfranchised 'others,' the 'they' whom the new fiction had introduced for the first time into the field of fictional representation."[6] Rather than re-inscribing the schism between the writer-intellectual and "the masses" that are the ostensible object of the new fiction (as discussed in Chapter One), the shift in the late 1920s and early 1930s heralded the arrival of a new, collective hero, the "unified, purposeful political aggregation" of the

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[6] Martson, Anderson, *The Limits of Realism,* 201.

crowd.[7] The May Fourth romantic ideal of fiction's transformative social role, in the midst of this era's historical and political crises, became outmoded as insufficiently stark in its ideological outlook. The crowd's assumption of the mantle of revolutionary fiction, can in this way be seen as a precursor to the formulaic collectivism of the Maoist era that followed the rigid prescriptions laid out in 1942 at "Talks at the Yan'an Conference on Literature and Art" (Zai Yan'an wenyi zuotanhui shang de jianghua 在延安文藝座談會上的講話). At the same time, what makes much of this fiction more interesting than the socialist realist works than came later is precisely the unsettled, volatile mixture of mass politics and literary experimentation.

While this chapter is significantly indebted to Anderson's work, I expand his analysis in the way I pay particular attention to his characterization of crowd representation in these years as "abstractly conceived yet possessed of an overwhelming physical immediacy."[8] The "eruption of the crowd" in fiction signaled a new imperative of literary creation, that of realizing (and conveying the realization of) the magnitude and magnanimity of crowds in real, concrete numbers. I am arguing that the way in which this sense of physical immediacy is achieved is precisely in the sense of doubleness found in the crowd image. The crowds in these works are in a constant confrontation with death, whether faced with the possibility for corporeal annihilation, galvanized by the tempting desire for mob violence, or evocative of the hosts of the already deceased. The synecdochical relationship to these ghostly death crowds sustains their representational power, but also opens up a dimension of uncertainty in their connection to the

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[7] Ibid.

[8] Ibid., 182.

ideologically reified notion of the masses. In other words, by linking the crowd image presented in these stories with their spectral double, I am arguing for a reading of "literary massification" beyond an increased recognition of the ideological limitations on collective representation. The interpellative call to to group action is itself a kind of conjuring that brings forth not just the mantle of history, but also its gruesome casualties.

The notion of a crowd double I am employing here is drawn from Elias Canetti's classic study of the crowd and its complex relationship with dynamics of power. Canetti introduces the idea of the "the invisible crowd," a conception he suspects to be among humanity's oldest.[9] For Canetti, the realm of the invisible crowd is an imaginary construct, populated by two notions of multitude. First, the "invisible dead" are the spirits of the ancestors from whom culture is inherited. These masses, Canetti notes, "were generally thought of as being together ... and generally it was assumed that there were a great many of them."[10] Canetti illustrates the second type of the invisible crowd with a selection from the *Book of Songs* (*Shi jing* 詩經), the earliest existing collection of Chinese poetry.[11] Canetti finds the poem striking for its use of a swarm of locusts to

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[9] Elias Canetti, *Crowds and Power*, 42.

[10] Ibid., 47.

[11] Canetti uses Arthur Waley's translation of the poem "Locusts" (*Zhong si* 螽斯), rendered below with the corresponding Chinese:

螽斯羽詵詵兮	The locusts' wings say 'throng, throng';
宜爾子孫振振兮	Well may your sons and grandsons / Be a host innumerable.
螽斯羽薨薨兮	The locusts' wings say 'bind, bind';
宜爾子孫繩繩兮	Well may your sons and grandsons / Continue in an endless line.
螽斯羽揖揖兮	The locusts' wings say 'join, join'
宜爾子孫蟄蟄兮	Well may your sons and grandsons / Be forever at one

See *The Book of Songs*. Trans. Arthur Waley. New York: Grove Press, 1960. 173. Canetti also mentions this poem in a 1962 conversation with Theodor Adorno as evidence of an "archaic element" and the desire for enormity of numbers among societies in their "primitive stages." Adorno points out that despite the age of the *Shi jing*, it nonetheless "presumes a highly advanced, indeed an advanced hierarchic society." See Canetti, Elias. "*Crowds and Power*: Elias Canetti and Theodor W. Adorno, in Conversation." Trans. Bruce Krajewski and David Darby. *Critical Essays on Elias Canetti*. Ed. David Darby. New York: G.K. Hall and Co., 2000. 146-147.

symbolically refer to posterity, exhibiting them "not as a harmful vermin, but as praiseworthy in the exemplary power of increase."[12] In addition to his insight into the spectrality of the crowd imaginary, Canetti's projective reversal of the invisible crowd of the dead places crowds along a temporal spectrum, with each concern (the host of the dead and the multitudes of yet-to-be-born) weighing on the imagination of the contemporary crowds between the two.

His penchant for ahistorical generalization notwithstanding, Canetti's observation on the poem from the *Book of Songs* is of further relevance to my argument in the way that images of multiplicity and mass seem to evoke one another, no matter the conventional implications that may be associated with with them. The signifier of growth and increase that Canetti locates in the poem illustrates this correspondence between masses past, present, and absent. Locusts, despite their destructive and plague-ridden connotations, become the ideal model for a family tree; in the same way, the revolutionary crowd is at once conceived as a precursor to a plentiful, utopian future, yet also carries the threat of destruction, violence, and even its own extinction. Neither reading can advance without invoking the other. For Canetti the underlying characteristic of all crowds is growth; at its most potent the crowd signifies this open-ended multiplicity. In this way, the crowd and its representation are already over-determined, following a "logic of a collective phantasm that transcends all observable states and disregards inherent limits to its aspirations," as Johann Arnason and David Roberts

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[12] Elias Canetti, *Crowds and Power*, 52.

write.[13] As the crowd resists the limitations placed on it by historical and political structures (seeking to become, in the modern sense, a "movement"), its image is constantly on the verge of conjuring this ghostly oblivion.

The persistence of the the deceased past Canetti expresses in his explication of the "invisible crowd" recalls the ambivalent recurrence of ghosts in Chinese literature, and brings into question literature's ability to counter the corporeal horror of mass death and destruction. The New Culture Movement's intellectual campaign to exterminate these ghosts and finally break free of the superstitious, cannibalistic literary forms of traditional China also utilizes the language and logic of multiplicity to describe this endeavor. Hu Shi 胡適, echoing Canetti, contrasts two types of invisible crowds in an offhand boast in 1927,

> It is only because I believed perfectly well that in the "pile of rotten paper" are numberless old ghosts who can eat people and cast a spell over people. For the harm that they do, they are much more deadly than the germs discovered by Pasteur. But it is also because I believe that though I am powerless against the germs, I take pride in my ability to "chain the demons and subdue the ghosts."[14]

Even while focusing on making a stark distinction between the modern, enlightened world of science (which has rendered visible the microscopic realm of bacteria) and China's decadent, superstitious past, Hu Shi, drawing on the language of collectivity and mass, draws a certain parallel. The innumerable demons that threaten to devour and mystify China, are even viewed as more dangerous than the other, scientifically verifiable invisible mass, bacteria.

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[13] Arnason, Johann P. and David Roberts. *Elias Canetti's Counter-Image of Society: Crowds, Power, Transformation*. Rochester: Camden House, 2004. 93.

[14] Hu Shi, quoted in Hsia, Tsi-An. *The Gate of Darkness: Studies on the Leftist Literary Movement in China*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1968. 159.

Hu Shi's comment and Canetti's text share an additional tropological point. Hu Shi's reference to the "pile of rotten paper" (an allusion to the newly excavated Dunhuang 敦煌 manuscripts then on display in Paris) to metonymically designate the corpus of Chinese literature reminds us of another type of "crowd double" Canetti puts forward. The "heap of the dead" represents a material accumulation of the invisible crowd brought about through death and starkly merges the mimetic limits demonstrated by both violence and the crowd. Not only is the "heap of the dead" the primary objective of war, but it exerts upon culture resonances that felt even in the present.[15] The material concretization in the choice of words to describe these phenomena, "pile" and "heap," suggests a haphazard collection of abandoned detritus, and at the same time implies a singularization into something whole. This transformation, from random accumulation to an aggregate unit, not only follows the grammatical trick of the crowd, but also serves to monumentalize history's brutal indifference toward particular remembrances. At the same time, by drawing our attention to the corporeal remnants of history's "progress," these phrases suggest that even in absence, silence, and erasure, traces are left behind. Hu Shi and Canetti both alert us to these remains, whether corporeal or of corpus, that threaten to return.

Death, violence, and their bodily remains have certainly populated modern Chinese literature in heaps from its beginnings. One such example can be found in the late Qing dynasty novel *Women's Words Overheard* (*Linnü yu* 鄰女語) by Youhuan Yusheng 憂患餘生 (the pseudonym of Lian Mengqing 連夢青 indicates quite literally

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[15] Elias Canetti, *Crowds and Power*, 67-73.

one who has survived a catastrophe). The protagonist, Jin Bumo 金不磨, is a scholar who sacrifices his entire fortune in order to help the refugees displaced by the Boxer Rebellion (*Yihetuan yundong* 義和團運動) at the turn of the twentieth century. Traveling north through a snowy pastoral landscape in Shandong, Jin encounters a horrifying spectacle:

> He saw in the woods countless heads hung on the trees: heads of young and old, male and female, fat and skinny; some with eyes open and some with eyes closed, some with hair and some with nothing but a skull and some with deep, sunken eye sockets. High and low, big and small, the heads were all hung on the trees. There was not a single tree without heads hung from it. Every single head had a red turban on it, and on each turban was written the character for "Buddha." Bumo inquired with the locals and learned that the heads belonged to the a group of Boxer rebels who were killed by a Commander Mei on the orders of Governor Yuan as a public example of beheading. 只見樹林子裡面，掛了無數人頭。老的少的，男的女的，胖的瘦的，有開眼睛的，有閉眼睛的，有有頭髮的，有無頭髮的，有剩著空骷髏的，有陷了眼睛眶子的。高高下下，大大小小，都掛在樹林子上。沒有一株樹上沒有掛人頭，沒有一顆人頭上沒有紅布包頭，沒有一個紅布包頭上沒有佛字。不磨問明土人，知道這就是義和團大隊拳匪，盡為梅統領所殺，奉了袁撫台的號令，梟首示眾。[16]

Contemplating the terrible scene, Jin notes that the snowy tableau resembles a peach blossom grove, recalling the famously absent utopia of the Peach Blossom Spring (*taohua yuan* 桃花源), immortalized by Tao Yuanming 陶淵明 (Tao Qian 陶潛). The comparison seems to evoke a possibility lost to silence with the crowd's decapitation and, simultaneously, the opportunity gained by "a privileged narratorial subject capable of thinking and speaking" on their behalf.[17] Given the elements of the "public example" and the empathetic (yet ultimately helpless) intellectual in this episode, it would fit well with Chapter One's discussion of the figure of the crowd vis-à-vis the singular intellectual (condemning the execution, Jin refers to the victims as *yumin* 愚民, the

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[16] Youhuan Yusheng 憂患餘生. *Linü yu* 鄰女語 (Women's Words Overheard). *Zhongguo jindai xiaoshuo daxi* 中國近代小說大系 (Compendium of Modern Chinese Fiction). Vol. 41. Nanchang: Baihua zhou wenyi chubanshe, 1988. 461-462. English translation in Wang, David Der-wei. *The Monster That Is History: History, Violence, and Fictional Writing in Twentieth-Century China*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004. 15. Translation modified.

[17] David Der-wei Wang, *The Monster That Is History*, 16.

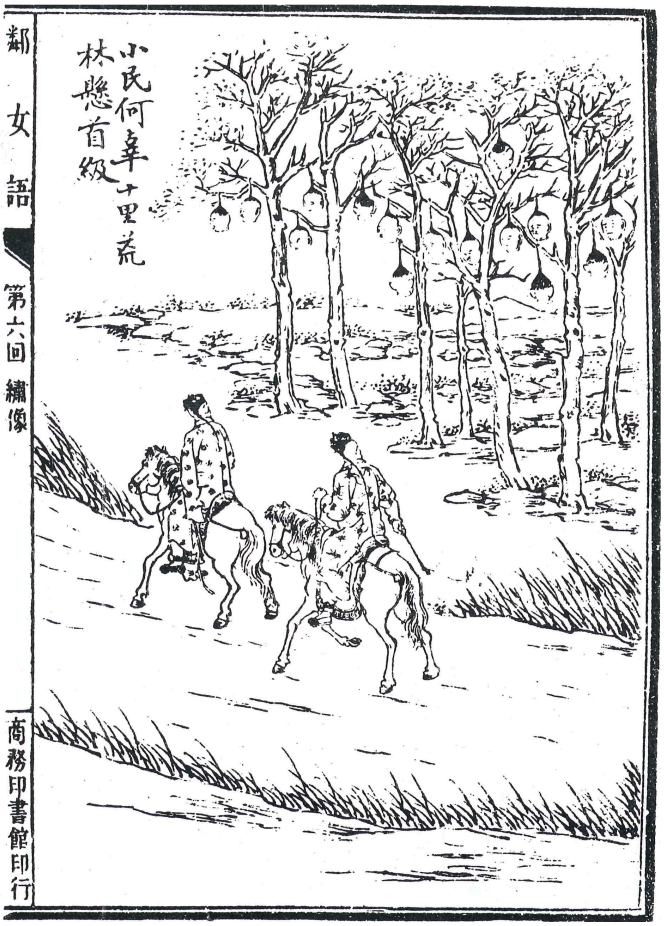

Fig. 2.1 An illustration of the "peach blossom grove" in Youhuan Yusheng's *Women's Words Overheard*.

"ignorant masses"). In this paradigm, the enlightened scholar, with great concern for the welfare of the nation, claims the authority to speak for the masses; the death crowd serves as a means to tap into the traumatized collective memory to galvanize feelings of national, urgent patriotism. My focus here, however, is instead on the "countless" (*wushu* 無數) aspect of the severed heads, the excess that both astonishes Jin Bumo and totalizes the heads of various shapes and sizes into a silent, cohesive whole. The case of *shizhong* here does more than generate the crowd as an audience; rather, the crowd that is produced in this case is a death crowd. As the number of dead increase, our ability to comprehend such violence is stifled. Jin Bumao's commitment to the national cause does nothing to counter his interpretive failure of the hanging heads' resounding silence. Moreover, this death crowd suggests a haunting within the Chinese historical memory, as if its modern subjecthood was constructed in part upon this kind of eternally recurring, silence of the collective dead.

Wang Jingzhi: The Heap of the Dead

Wang Jingzhi is mainly remembered for his poetry collections written in the first half of the 1920s. The first, entitled *Orchid Wind* (*Hui de feng* 蕙的風) and published in 1922, is comprised of free verse (*ziyou shi* 自由詩) mostly concerned with the youthful pursuit of romantic love and sexual desire (Wang was around twenty years old when he wrote most of the poems in this volume). Regarded as an iconoclast by his contemporaries for his candid confrontation with the social taboos surrounding these subjects of free love and romance, Wang was both criticized for his liberal attitude and celebrated for the modernist lyricism of his poetic expressions.[18] The success of *Orchid Wind* let Wang devote himself to his poetry full-time, and he moved from the idyllic surroundings of Hangzhou to the cosmopolitan metropolis of Shanghai, where he studied English and focused on his formal technique. His second volume, *The Lonely Country* (*Jimo de guo* 寂寞的國) displays a more studied approach to the poetic genre and demonstrates a more somber tone, but still remains full of sentimental sighs and inflated emotions. While working on this volume, Wang also produced a theoretical text, *Principles of Poetry* (*Shige yuanli* 詩歌原理), in which he concludes with comparing the role of the poet to that of the mythical creator Pan Gu 盤古:

> The poet is like Pan Gu. Pan Gu created heaven and earth. From his eyes he made the sun and moon, from his head he made the five mountains, from his hair he made the plants and trees, from his blood and veins the rivers and streams. So must the poet from his life, his flesh, and blood make poetry. His own life, his flesh and blood must be in his poems. The poet is a creator, not an imitator or an epigone. 詩人又和盤古氏一樣，盤古氏創造天地，以眼睛為日月，以頭顱為五岳，以毛髮為草木，以血脈為江河，詩人也應當把他自己

[18] For a helpful summary of the reaction to *Orchid Wind*, see Hockx, Michel. "*Born Poet and Born Lover*: Wang Jingzhi's Love Poetry within the May Fourth Context." *Modern Chinese Literature*, 9:2 (Fall 1996). 261-296.

> 的生命血肉來做詩，詩里面万不可沒有他自己的生命與血肉. 詩人乃是創造者，不是模仿者，不是效顰。[19]

For Wang, it seems, poetic creation is a bodily endeavor. Using flesh and blood to write may have been a passionate, rhetorical exaggeration in defense of his own work and style, but his pronouncement also reveals a corporeal investment in the text that, in Wang's later fictional output, manifests itself in a much more gruesome way.

The May 30th Incident of 1925, in which dozens of Chinese labor and anti-imperialist demonstrators were killed by police forces in the Shanghai International Settlement, galvanized many writers and intellectuals to commit themselves to the revolutionary cause, including Wang. Charles Laughlin discusses the outpuring of documentary narratives immediately following the massacre, and in particular the "dynamic, sensual relationship" that these writers established with the blood that was shed on that day, connecting these writers' meditations on the victims' corporeal sacrifices to the development of a collective subjectivity.[20] Ye Shengtao 葉聖陶 (pseudonym of Ye Shaojun 葉紹鈞), for example, wrote a short essay for the *Literary Weekly* (Wenxue zhoukan 文學周刊) magazine on his visit to the British police station where the demonstrators were killed. After discovering that the bloodstains had already been washed away, depriving him of his desire to "pay homage to the bloodstains of our dead friends, to lick up their blood with my tongue and swallow it down, 我想参拜我们

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[19] Wang Jingzhi 汪靜之. *Shige yuanli* 詩歌原理. *Wang Jingzhi wenji* 汪靜之文集 (Collected Works of Wang Jingzhi). Vol. 4. Ed. Fei Bai 飛白 and Fang Suping 方素平. Hangzhou: Xiling yinshe chuban she, 2006. 59. English translation in Michel Hockx, "*Born Poet and Born Lover*," 286.

[20] Laughlin, Charles A. *Chinese Reportage: The Aesthetic of Historical Experience*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2002. 80. The entire second chapter of Laughlin's book, "Public Demonstrations: The Mise-en-Scène of History," is very relevant to my argument in this dissertation.

的伙伴的血迹，我想用舌头舔尽所有的血迹，咽入肚里，”[21] Ye notes reassuringly that “the earth is soaked with blood, with our friends’ blood ... Where blood has irrigated and moistened the soil, flowers of blood will grow and fruits of blood will form. 这块土是血的土，血是我们的伙伴的血 ... 血灌溉着，滋润着，将会看到血的花开在这里，血的果结在这里。”[22] The righteous optimism that springs from Ye’s contemplation of the massacre even allows him to read the faces of others walking on the street as filled with a similar anger and concludes that “We are one! — there is hope, there is hope for sure, there is more than hope! 咱们一伙儿，有救，一定有救，——岂但有救而已。”[23] A literary engagement with the physical remainders and bodily traces of violence spurred not just political action, but the collectivizing of death. Laughlin puts it this way: “Not being tied to the life of a single body, the crowd is nevertheless capable of resurrection.” The memory of sacrifice and martyrdom, the rawness of which is re-inscribed in macabre detail in such literary work, becomes the basis for further staging of more crowds, literary and otherwise.

The May 30th Incident also had a profound impact on Wang Jingzhi. As he was nearing the completion of *The Lonely Country*, his romantic and lyrical tone took a much more solemn, even morbid, turn. He writes in the preface to the 1957 edition of the collection (edited down to just 60 pieces from an original edition of 93 in 1927), that in

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[21] Ye Shengtao 葉聖陶. “Wuyuesa yiri jiyu zhong 五月卅一日急雨中.” Zhongguo baogao wenxue congshu 中國報告文學叢書 (Collection of Chinese Reportage Literature), Vol. 1:1. Ed. Editing Committee for the Collection of Chinese Reportage Literature 中國報告文學叢書編輯委員會. Changsha: Changsha wenyi chubanshe, 1981. 22. Originally published in the June 28, 1925 edition of *Literary Weekly* 文學周刊. English in Ye Shengtao. “During the Rainstorm, 31 May.” Trans. Ian Ward. *Renditions* 37 (Spring 1992). 1-4. Translation modified.

[22] Ibid.

[23] Ibid., 24.

the summer of 1925 his poet-revolutionary friend Ying Xiuren 應修人 introduced him to Marx and Engel's *Manifesto of the Communist Party* (Gongchandang xuanyin 共產黨宣言 in Chinese), prompting him to compose some odes to the leftist cause for inclusion at the end of *The Lonely Country*.[24] "Worker's Song" (Laogong ge 勞工歌), written in the autumn of 1925, is among them:

You walking corpses who horde vast wealth!	霸占巨產的走肉行屍！
You are the foundation of all evil!	你們是一切罪惡的根底！
Your souls are crawling with shit-maggots,	你們的靈魂上爬滿糞蛆，
And in your hearts roost fiendish demons.	你們的心是惡魔所栖。
With our dried bones you	你們把我們的枯骨，
Pave the roads of your Eden;	去鋪你們伊甸園的道路；
Upon our corpses you make music,	在我們的屍身上作樂，
And upon our skulls you dance.	在我們的頭顱上跳舞。
。。。	
We want vengeance! We want retribution!	我們要復仇，我們要雪恨！
We will tear you limb from limb!	把你們粉骨碎身！
We will never forgive monsters like you,	我們定不饒恕如此惡物，
We are bound to eradicate and root you out!	勢必把你們滅種除根！[25]

Here, in what is one of Wang's first poems that betrays his earlier commitment to "not talk politics" (*bu tan zengzhi* 不談政治), a grotesque corporeality demonstrates the depth of Wang's enmity toward the imperialist foe. At the same time the poem draws our attention away from the politics of the struggle at hand and instead toward a kind of retributive "body politic" that inscribes political domination and resistance collectively upon the masses themselves. Revolution, as depicted in this poem, is the stage upon which a primal struggle for justice is enacted; the bones, skulls, and corpses upon which the enemy builds his capitalist utopia are "ours" (*women de* 我們的), appropriating the remains of the innumerable dead, sacrificed to the historical struggle, to vitalize and animate the living, righteous masses of the present.

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[24] Cherkassky, Leonard. "Wang Jingzhi, *Jimo de guo*, 1927." *A Selective Guide to Chinese Literature, 1900-1949 – Volume 3: The Poem*. Ed. Lloyd Haft. Leiden: F.J. Brill, 1989. 216-218.

[25] Wang Jingzhi. "Laogong ge 勞工歌" (Worker's Song). *Wang Jingzhi wenji*, Vol. 1. 288-289.

Immersed in the leftist literary scene in Shanghai, Wang, with some encouragement from Lu Xun, set about to dedicate his work toward the emerging Communist cause.[26] The majority of his output over the next few years, however, was not poetry, but fiction, including the novellas *The Instructions of Jesus* (Yesu de fenfu 耶穌的吩咐) (written in 1925), *The Story of Cuiying and Her Husband* (Cuiying jiqi fu de gushi 翠英及其夫的故事) (written in 1926), and the short story collection *Father and Daughter* (Fu yu nü 父與女) (written between 1927 and 1929). Although none of these fictional pieces were reprinted after 1949 until the compilation of Wang's collected works in 2006, they seem at least in part to have enjoyed a fairly wide circulation upon their initial printings.[27] However, the stark incongruence between his popular, romantic poetry and the excruciatingly detailed violence depicted in his fiction has resulted in an enduring critical neglect of Wang Jingzhi's modest fictional production. Furthermore, a discomfiting attention to sexual desire in the midst of this carnage underscores the spirit of transgressive indulgence with which these stories were composed.

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[26] Though the extent of Lu Xun and Wang Jingzhi's relationship was limited, the two enjoyed a cordial and supportive association. Besides encouraging Wang and "correcting" the poems Wang sent him in 1920, Lu Xun also defended Wan's first book of poetry, *Orchid Wind*, from the attacks of a certain Hu Menghua 胡夢華 in his essay "Fandui hanlei de pipingjia 反對含淚的批評家" (Against Teary-Eyed Critics). See Lu Xun, *Lu Xun quanji*, Vol. 1, 403-406. For a detailed summary of the criticism against Wang, see Michel Hockx, "*Born Poet and Born Lover*," 282-291. See also Lu Xun 魯迅. *Lu Xun pingdian Zhongguo zuojia* 魯迅評點中國作家 (Lu Xun's Comments on Chinese Writers). Ed. Yang Li'ang 楊里昂 and Peng Guoliang 彭國梁. Changsha: Yuelu shu she, 2007. 316-317.

[27] Raoul David Findeisen notes that the totals of the 1931 printing of *The Instructions of Jesus* numbered from 4000 to 6000. See Findeisen, Raoul David. "Wang Jingzhi's *Yesu de fenfu* (*The Instructions by Jesus*): A Christian Novel?" *Bible in Modern China: The Literary and Intellectual Impact*. Ed. Irene Eber, et al. Nettetal: Institut Monumenta Serica, Sankt Augustin, 1999. 284-285.

When Wang's fiction is not completely ignored,[28] it is glossed as an antifeudal parable. His use of such violent extremes to demonstrate the savage, cannibalistic core of dogmatic Confucian practice, thereby making the inverse argument for rationality, enlightenment, and progress. From this perspective, Wang's fiction fits nicely into the established "literature of blood and tears" paradigm:

> … It symbolizes that part of the inner psyche of those that exist in the lower levels of society, suffering without recourse. It is only from this angle that we can truly understand Wang Jingzhi's writing of such seemingly salacious stories; they obliquely reveal the author's extreme abhorrence to this inhuman world. … 它象征了存在社會底層的那一部分人內心的悲苦無告。只有從這個角度，我們才能真正理解汪靜之筆下那些看似有些"猥褻"的故事，它們曲折地吐露著作家對這個非人世界的極度厭惡。[29]

Wang's own prefaces to his work also support this reading. He defends the representational violence in his story *The Instructions of Jesus*, in which a young woman, lamenting her arranged marriage, carries on an affair with her true love. After being discovered by her fellow villagers, she is crucified on a door (with her lover's decapitated head nailed to the door between her legs) and floated down the river. Wang explains in the preface that he wrote the story as both a reprimand of those hypocritical moralists (*daodejia* 道德家) who demand such justice, as well as a sarcastic warning to young couples to heed their intolerance and, it is implied, keep their affairs discreet.[30] In this sense, besides conforming to the motivation for the writing of "blood and tears," Wang's fiction also follows a long-standing tradition of Chinese fiction that veils its more explicit flourishes with moralizing safeguards and platitudes.

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[28] In their brief introduction to Wang Jingzhi and his Hangzhou-based poetry group, Bonnie S, McDougall and Kam Louie claim that Wang stopped writing altogether after joining the CCP in 1925. See McDougall, Bonnie S. and Kam Louie. *The Literature of China in the Twentieth Century*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1997. 50.

[29] Qiao Lihua 喬麗華, "Xin wenxue lushang de bashezhe 新文學路上的跋涉者" (A Traveler on the Road of New Literature), *Wang Jingzhi wenji*, Vol. 3, 3.

[30] Wang Jingzhi, "*Zi xu* 自序" (Author's Preface), *Wang Jingzhi wenji*, Vol. 3, 21-23.

Wang's fictional exhibition of violence does more, however, than simply affirm the prevailing discourses of his time, but questions their ostensible intent of forming a modern historical subject. In a statement accounting for the "believability" (*xin* 信) of *The Instructions of Jesus*, Wang asks rhetorically, "This kind of thing happened tens of thousands of times in ancient times, why couldn't it be reenacted tens of thousands of times today? Do we know how many thousands of years should pass before it would not be reenacted again? 這種事古時有過千万次，難道現在便不再不重演千万次？曉得要再過幾千年才能不重演呢？"[31] Juxtaposing this statement with the poetic excerpt from *The Lonely Country*, we can see how Wang Jingzhi's perspective on history as a haunting violence ritually re-presenting itself in the present precipitates his literary "political turn." That is, the radical changes his writing underwent in the years from around 1925 to 1929, from a lyrical romantic poetry to a disenchanted bloody fiction, simultaneously constitutes both a literary effort to cope with the rapidly changing and increasingly disturbing historical circumstances as well as conspicuously revealing a transgressive impulse shared between the two literary sensibilities. That is, the affective power of Wang's love poetry, magnified by the shock of its challenge to social taboos, spills over into his fiction in the form of violent spectacle. Rather than treading the boundaries of romantic and sexual desire through poetry, Wang's fiction utilizes a similar aesthetic dynamic through the abject body to charge his historical and moral message; the freshly discovered modern desire that carries Wang's poetry to such emotional, lyrical extremes, may also contribute to this annihilation of his historical subject in his fiction,

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[31] Wang Jingzhi, "*Xu hou* 序後" (Postscript to the Preface), *Wang Jingzhi wenji*, Vol. 3, 24.

revealing a dark underpinning of the May Fourth theory of historical consciousness upheld as the model for the new nation. The impulse to excess, driven by the ever-expanding roster of corpses and the seemingly multitudinous numbers that occupy this violent imaginary, pushes against the limits of both mimetic representation and "authentic history" (*xinshi* 信史).

"Human Meat," as well, seems to be a product of this newly discovered political awareness coming in the wake of historical crisis. When Wang wrote this story in January of 1928, the Communist movement in China had suffered a series of monumental setbacks, particularly following Chiang Kai-shek's April 12 directive from the previous year to purge Communists and their sympathizers from the Nationalist Party in Shanghai (the result of which saw many hundreds disappeared, executed, and massacred), through the staggering failure and defeat of the urban uprisings in Nanchang, Hunan, and Guangzhou that autumn and winter. The mass-based, radical utopian movement Wang had committed to after the May 30th Incident was in the midst of a catastrophic collapse, leaving many distraught and emotionally reeling. For Wang, the desperate situation prompted the recollection of a previous historical crisis, as if history was being reenacted through this very mass death and atrocity.

Wang's choice to set "Human Meat" during the years of the Taiping Rebellion (*Taiping tianguo* 太平天國), according to the preface of *Father and Daughter*, is to "unflinchingly reveal the interior of humanity 毫不惋惜地暴露人性之內面" and takes issue with an anthropological idea of a period of contrition after the consumption of

human flesh.[32] Wang is neither making claims of historical truth and accuracy, nor seeking to locate an antecedent to the contemporary proletarian cause of the Chinese revolution.[33] Even more provocatively, Wang's vision of the movement of history, while still being based in large part on the aggregation of human bodies, has more to do with the repeated failure of such collective bonding than any notion of so-called "progress." He is positing a disjunctive relationship between the Taiping Rebellion and the carnage of 1927; rather than ideology, the shared ground between them, for Wang, is in their *lack* of historical fulfillment and, in its place, the consequence of mass death. This deficit in the historical registers in turn produces the "interior of humanity" in the form of cannibalistic massacre. This pessimistic view deviates substantially from the realist formula that reflects an insufferable condition in order to testify to the necessity of collective action (thus privileging the prefiguration of reality as it comes into being), Wang's fictional reenactment of the Taiping Rebellion indulges in "hardcore realism," foregrounding the corporeal violence that produces a darker version of the collectivity. That is, the intensity and multiplicity of Wang's attention to the corporeal belies any historical or ideological truth claims, but instead demonstrates how the failure of their interaction persists through bodily violence.

As briefly described above, "Human Meat" tells the absurd plight of White Tiger Pavilion 白虎亭, a small village under repeated invasion by Taiping rebels. The

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[32] Wang Jingzhi. "Xu 序 (Preface)." In *Wang Jingzhi wenji*, Vol. 3. 148.

[33] Although the Taipings would later be incorporated into the official process of historical legitimation as an egalitarian predecessor to the Communists, no such official codification had occurred by the time of the writing of "Human Meat." For example, the first mentions of the Taiping Rebellion as part of this historical revolutionary trajectory from Mao Zedong 毛澤東 come from *after* the establishment of the Communist base at Yan'an in 1935.

historical Taiping Rebellion lasted more than a decade in the mid-19th century, resulting in the deaths of around 20 million Chinese and nearly bringing the tottering Qing Dynasty to its end. Under the direction of the failed examination candidate Hong Xiuquan 洪秀全, the uprising took place in a maelstrom of social, historical, and cultural contexts, yet seems in part to have been instigated by Hong's muddled reading of a evangelical Christian tract, Liang Fa's 梁發 "Good Words to Exhort the Age" (*Quanshi liangyan* 勸世良言), and subsequent conflation of apocalyptic vision with political program. Philip Kuhn writes of the inspirational pamphlet,

> The work conveys repeatedly a confusion between heaven and earthly kingdoms. The Biblical term 'Heavenly Kingdom', for instance (rendered as *t'ien-kuo* [*tianguo* 天國]), is glossed as referring to both the land of the blessed after death and the congregation of the faithful on earth. And throughout the work, the sequential confusion of the biblical material suggests that the coming of the Messiah was not simply a historical event that happened at a single point in the past, but rather an apocalyptic world crisis that might occur any number of times.[34]

Kuhn's observation is helpful in identifying two literary resonances between the Taiping Rebellion and the vision of history I am ascribing to Wang Jingzhi's "Human Meat." First, the specious congruity between the crowds of the dead and the living exposes a crucial reciprocation between, or even transposition of, the "invisible dead" and the world of the living. Secondly, the pamphlet's insinuation of a recurring apocalypse or iterative mode of historical catastrophe suggests that Hong Xiuquan, as well as Wang Jingzhi, was fraught with the sense of historical disquiet by way of a repeated, violent echo.

The uncanny sense of disjunctive recurrence is also present within the story. We are introduced to Scholar Wang through his explication to his fellow villagers on this figure of Hong Xiuquan, in which he claims that Hong is most certainly a descendant,

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[34] Kuhn, Philip A. "The Taiping Rebellion." *The Cambridge History of China*. Vol. 10, Pt. 1. Ed. John K. Fairbank. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1978. 267-268.

and possibly the reincarnation, of Chi You 蚩尤, the mythical deity of war and chaos subdued by Huang Di 皇帝 in the 26th century BC.[35] The villagers, for their part, considered the Taiping rebels to be part of a different realm from humans and rather that of the ghostly and demonic. The horror this "band of goblins and devils 一群惡鬼凶神" inspired is greater than their fear of monsters or corpses, and produces a seemingly collective urge toward suicide:

> Their fear drove them to the point of madness, and many threw themselves into the dykes to commit suicide. When the number in Eight Trigrams Dyke was at its highest, and the entire surface of the water was full of corpses, there was no open place for those who came later. Thereupon they would use both hands to part the corpses and bore their way into the water through the gap. 伊們恐怖到發瘋發狂的程度，有許多便投塘自盡；投八卦塘的人最多，滿塘的水都浮著死屍，後來的人竟沒有空位置了，於是用兩手把死屍分開，從兩個死屍之間的空隙裡鑽到水裡去。[36]

The fervency of the terror produced by the arrival of the Taiping rebels also engenders the kind of crowd formation that seeks its own extinction. While this kind of "massification" differs significantly from the kind of unification advocated by the collective movements of the twentieth century, particularly in terms of the latter's ultimate objective to usurp power, it nonetheless reveals a sinister (and shared) desire of these respective crowd impulses to push against all limitations (Canetti puts it as the crowd's urge "to seize everyone within reach; anything shaped like a human being can join it.")[37] — even across the boundaries separating the living from the dead. That is, by obscuring the divisions between the horror of reality and the realm of the dead, Wang alerts us to both the complications of sacrifice, exploding the tensions between the competing desires to die together and to survive alone.

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[35] Wang Jingzhi, "*Ren rou* 人肉" (Human Meat), *Wang Jingzhi wenji*, Vol. 3, 175.

[36] Ibid., 176.

[37] Elias Canetti, *Crowds and Power*, 17.

The invasion depicted in "Human Meat" is actually the third time the "longhairs" have come to White Tiger Pavilion. The third person narrator tells us that the last time they came was summer, and therefore when the villagers fled into the surrounding forest inexhaustible supplies of birds, small game, eggs, snakes, fruits, and grasses were available to support sustenance. The first time the rebels ravaged their village, however, it was, like the time of the telling the story, winter. Because on that occasion the Taiping's murderous rampage went largely uncontested, many more were killed, thus increasing the amount of dead (or nearly dead) available for cannibalizing. This year, the villagers' suffering has become worse due to the fact that too many have survived:

> Although there was a good several hundred people on the mountain, without the 'longhairs' coming to kill them they were of no use. If you yourself took up a sharp knife or an ax head to take off someone's hand, he would want to take off your hand as well. The outcome of this duel, who wins and who loses, wasn't certain at all. You're afraid you might the one who won't get to taste his meat, and even that your own meat may end up in his belly. Therefore, even though several hundred people on this mountain are all eyeing each other's flesh and sizing it up, they can only look on in hopes of relieving their hunger unable to wish it into their mouth, much less get it into their belly. 這山上人雖有好幾百，但"長毛"不來代殺仍是無用的，你假使自己拿尖刀或斧頭去下那個人的手，他也要下你的手，決斗的結果誰勝誰敗是沒有把握的，恐怕你沒有嘗著他的肉，倒把你自己的肉去果了他的肚腹了. 所以這山上的幾百人雖然大家都是我看想你的肉，你中意我的肉，卻只能望梅止渴，想不到口，吃不下肚.[38]

Like Lu Xun's famous short story "Diary of a Madman" (Kuangren riji 狂人日記), Wang Jingzhi is condemning the sustained and highly developed "cannibalistic" tradition of feudal China, where the oppressive force of cultural custom is perpetuated by self-interest and sanctimonious moralizing. However, whereas in Lu Xun's fiction we see his reasoned iconoclasm repeatedly seduced by the dark side of enlightenment (thus highlighting the very limits of the realist discourse he is ostensibly espousing), in Wang's fiction these very limits are repeatedly transgressed, without recourse to any sort enlightenment program, no matter how illusory.

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[38] Wang Jingzhi. "*Ren rou*," 189-190.

The ironic notion that an increase of death could actually relieve the suffering of the survivors by providing them a source of food and nourishment constitutes the principal structure of Wang's mode of critique. The story builds around the strangely symbiotic relationship between the survivor, exemplified by Scholar Wang, and the continuously expanding "heap of the dead." As an embodiment of the Confucian tradition and its foremost authority within the story, Scholar Wang not only manifests the bloodlust at the root of its self-serving hypocrisy, but also exposes the death crowd as the foundation upon which its power is legitimized. The image of the survivor in Wang's story again collides with Elias Canetti's conception of the crowd in *Crowds and Power*. For Canetti, survival is more than sustaining one's existence through suffering, but contains the seed of power through the "dangerous accumulation of the experience of others' deaths."[39] Through the death of another, in other words, one's own power expands. The ultimate survivor, therefore, becomes the ruler: "The dead lie helpless; he stands upright amongst them, and it is as though the battle had been fought in order for him to survive it."[40] Canetti, acutely aware of the contingency between the survivor and the crowd, goes on to identify the feeling of satisfaction in the act of survival, outweighing any sense of grief at the loss of compatriots, and even describes it as part of a trajectory of "dangerous and insatiable passion" that constitutes a foundational element of "the paranoiac type of ruler."[41] By introducing a kind of desire with excessive

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[39] Elias Canetti, "*Crowds and Power*: Elias Canetti and Theodor W. Adorno, in Conversation," 137-138.

[40] Elias Canetti, *Crowds and Power*, 266.

[41] Ibid., 268-270.

compulsions into the theme of survival, Canetti's formulation may help us account for Scholar Wang's relationship to the death crowd in "Human Meat."

In one of the most scathingly satirical episodes in the novel, Scholar Wang is fleeing the Taipings along with his wife and daughter-in-law. When it becomes clear to Scholar Wang that his female family members will be unable to escape the fast-approaching "longhairs" because of their bound feet, he encourages them to sacrifice themselves in order to preserve their chastity and promises to come back to attend to their bodies. His wife, well-versed in the Confucian doctrine of womanly virtues, prepares to jump without hesitation, pausing only long enough to hand over some pearls he suddenly becomes concerned about losing. Wang's daughter-in-law, however, has no such wish to die, particularly after witnessing her mother-in-law's headlong tumble.

> The scholar tensely hurried her, his fixed eyes, deep and penetrating, and the dignified cleft between his nose and mouth revealing a kind of persuasive, serious integrity… Seeing that their window of opportunity was desperate, he could no longer procrastinate. With his hand he gave her one good push, at the same time from his mouth blurted the words:
>
> "Your ghosts should not resent me, I've done right by you!"
>
> But his daughter-in-law was already falling on the same path her mother-in-law had just passed: in the same position as her mother-in-law, in the same form, and with the same movement she tumbled, and never heard her father-in-law's comforting words.
>
> Feeling relieved after his duty was done, the scholar pulled his quilt around his shoulders and took to his heels.
>
> 舉人這樣急急地催促，不斜視的深銳的眼光和口鼻之間的威嚴的八字紋都露出一種令人懾服的庄嚴鄭重的正氣. … 看著時機非常迫促，再也不能拖延下去了，便用手狠命把媳婦向下一推，同時嘴里迸出這樣的話：
>
> "你們的鬼魂不要怨恨我，我是為你好！"
>
> 但是媳婦已經沉著剛才婆婆所經過的路線，和婆婆同樣的姿勢，同樣的形狀，同樣的動作 — 這樣地滾下去了，並沒有聽見公公安慰伊的好話.
>
> 舉人如釋重負，把棉被馱在肩上撥腳就跑。[42]

Wang Jingzhi unmasks the survivor desire as spelled out by Canetti here, and moreover couples the notion of survival with the enforcement of the Confucian hierarchy through sacrifice. Moreover, the sinister assembly of the death crowd becomes an expression of

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[42] Wang Jingzhi. "*Ren rou*," 185.

the same guiding force of Chinese historical legitimation, thereby conflating the violence inflicted by the system of Confucian ethics with the historical "aberration" of the Taiping rebellion. That is, the maintenance of the system of ritual and sacrifice is sustained through and cooperates with the violence stimulated by the Taipings.

Wang Jingzhi, in pointed and unsettling fashion, exposes this Confucian tradition on the very grounds that have perpetuated it for so many centuries. In *Violence and the Sacred*, René Girard discuss the notion of sacrifice dependent on a pivotal "misunderstanding" as to its purpose, a slight of hand seeking to displace imminent violence in the name of restoring social harmony. Underlying this sacrificial substitution, however, is perpetuity of the "fundamental absurdity" of blind and senseless violence.[43] Rather than a symbolic revitalization of moral community, Scholar Wang's murderous enforcement of sacrificial tradition lays bare the arbitrary violence upon which the Confucian system of ethics is based. (In the same way, by the end of the story, the refugees have begun calling the meat of the corpses they eat by the name *mirou* 米肉, or "rice meat.") Scholar Wang's final plea to his daughter-in-law as she tumbles down the mountainside not to return to haunt him, however, alerts us to the pretense of such a sacrifice and heightens the satirical effect.

We can push this idea further, however, when we consider the story's climactic scene in which Scholar Wang is wandering the forest alone in search of food. Upon spying in the distance a large woman fleeing two longhairs in hot pursuit and left with no place to hide, Scholar Wang, in a perfect contrast to Canetti's ideal "survivor" atop the

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[43] Girard, René. *Violence and the Sacred*. Trans. Patrick Gregory. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977. 5-6.

"heap of the dead," buries himself under a pile of corpses. His sensibilities are offended, however, when he discovers that the naked body directly on top of him belongs to a woman, from which, moreover, water drips into his mouth, the result of his warm breath condensing on her mons pubis. After the longhairs have brutally disposed of the woman they were chasing, he emerges from his hiding place when he hears other people approaching, and leads them to the recently murdered woman's body, where they argue over the legal right to consume it. Scholar Wang, being the most learned among the group, advocates using the Confucian propriety system to decide on how the "rice meat" will be partitioned. The story ends with Scholar Wang taking his share into the forest alone, and, cooking it over a makeshift fire, ultimately deciding that it's actually pretty delicious, even if could use a little salt.

Scholar Wang's intimate, physical contact with the "heap of the dead" here leads us to consider Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection. Neither subject nor object, the abject effects a breakdown in the symbolic order by which the meaning and social relations are constructed, and through the intensity of its very materiality, erupts into reality as a traumatic reminder of the separation and exclusion necessary to the establishment of being, whether social or individual. Not surprisingly, the corpse is the ultimate figure of the abject, of "death infecting life."[44] Scholar Wang's mock burial among actual corpses, a tactic not unlike the mythical examples of sacrificial substitution cited by Girard, comprises, in Kristeva's words, "the culminating form of that experience of the subject to which it is revealed that all objects are based merely on the inaugural *loss* that laid the

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[44] Kristeva, Julia. *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. Trans. Leon S. Roudiez. New York: Columbia University Press, 1982. 4.

foundations for its own being."[45] His contact with the woman's corpse, in particular with the most, in Scholar Wang's view, *impure* portion of her body and the "exchange" of bodily fluid with it, precipitates a limit, transgressed; the cannibalistic feast that follows is, consequently, the reconstitution of the boundaries of the subject and the "loss" from which Wang constructs the modern Chinese historical subject as one in recurring confrontation with the abject. That is, the encounter with the abject in "Human Meat" means less of a breakdown of the symbolic order than an affirmation of its place at the base of Chinese society and history.

More intriguing in this context, considering the momentous role given to writers and authors at the time of the writing of "Human Meat," is the significance of literature in the respective arguments of Kristeva and Girard. For Kristeva, literature is an essential vehicle through which the abject is confronted, as both the abject's "judge and accomplice." In this way, literature (and language in general) is a symbolic substitute constantly rewriting and recovering the primary breakdown of the subject.[46] Girard, as well, suggests that narrative may be implicated in the process of sacrificial substitution, revealing on one hand the act of the substitution while at the same time performing one of its own.[47]

In "Human Meat," the protagonist Wang shares a surname with the story's author, suggesting a morbidly self-aware link between the Confucian scholars of old and the intellectuals of the contemporary China, embroiled in controversy at the time debating

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[45] Ibid., 5.

[46] Ibid., 16.

[47] René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, 6.

how to best represent their commitment to social revolution and the masses. Thus, not only does the displacement that sacrifice is predicated upon also underpin the idea of haunting (as the madness and violence of the Taiping rebellion haunt the modern revolution in the form of mass death, the writer, as well, is visited by the specter of his own dubious role in Chinese society), but, recalling Wang Jingzhi's idealization of the mythical Pan Gu's sacrifice of his own flesh and blood for the sake of poetic creation, becomes the sustenance through which the narrative is produced. In the end, rather than nourishing the collective spirit of the people with his own flesh and blood, Wang's self-titled doppelgänger in "Human Meat" instead consumes the flesh of others. Thus the text follows Kristeva's designation as both the "judge and accomplice" of the cannibalistic feast, satirically decrying it as the gruesome undercurrent of Chinese history, while simultaneously reviving these ghosts in its confrontation with the abject. That is, while it ostensibly reveals the social violence haunting China's history, it also implicates the text itself as part of this sacrificial ruse: fiction and writing that explore these limits participate in this perpetual series of displacements of violence. Simply put, Wang's literary excess comes at the expense of the promise of revolution, initiating a pattern of sacrificial substitution sustained throughout the text.

Yet, there is also some irony in the tendency to interpret this kind of violence as allegorical or satirical (as suggested in Wang's own stated motivation). This kind of conventional hermeneutics substitutes principled intentions for the sheer violence at work here; pushed to such multiplicitous extremes, we are the ones who divert our eyes from its brutality in an effort to place it into comprehensible, rational, historical categories.

This kind of textual sacrifice can merely (re)expose the perpetuity of the displacements that led to its production. In this light perhaps it is not out of place that Wang would reproduce the following criticism of his colleague at Jinan University 暨南大學, Chen Zhongfan 陳鐘凡 in his preface to *Father and Daughter*:

> [Wang] has concocted such an obscene story as to elicit revulsion. … When writers reach this state of complete loss of reason, their conscience has rotted, dripping with pus and blood, with a stink beyond putrid! … [汪] 極猥褻的甚至可以引起憎惡的故事也編造出來了. … 文學家的頭腦到這時是完全失去理性了，他們的心肝是腐爛了，膿血淋漓，臭不堪聞的腐爛了![48]

In the above analysis, I have detailed the ways in which Wang Jingzhi approaches the mass politics of his day by recounting the violent spectacle of massacre in China's past. Drawing on the theories of Canetti, Girard, and Kristeva, I link the notions of survival, sacrifice, and the abject to the death crowd in order to show how mass-based revolutions are underpinned with the specter of violence, massacre, silence, and haunting. The volatile impulse to excess that drives "Human Meat" to such grotesque limits, in short, also infects crowds with the possibility of violence. Contrasting Wang Jinzhi's macabre, fatalistic vision of excess is Zhang Tianyi's short story "Hatred," to which we now turn.

Zhang Tianyi: Fuck Your Ancestors

Unlike Wang Jingzhi's fictional undertaking, Zhang Tianyi's short story output is both abundant and acclaimed. In the decade between 1928 and 1938, Zhang produced prolifically and in a variety of fictional modes, from exercises in socialist realism and social satire, to psychological character studies and children's literature. Renowned for

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[48] Quoted in Wang Jingzhi, "Xu," 147.

his observational acuity and trenchant wit, Zhang has been hailed as one of the best writers of the decade.[49] Zhang's satirical bite, particularly when it exposes hypocritical self-interest behind seemingly public-spirited motivations for behavior in stories such as "Mr. Jing Ye" (*Jing Ye xiansheng* 荊野先生, 1930) and "Spring Breeze" (*Chun feng* 春風, 1936), is primarily read as "an ironic revelation of the basic human abjectness and cruelty."[50] To sustain irony, however, contradiction is necessary. Thus while Zhang's workman-like efforts at literary massification, which includes not only the sheer amount of his output, but his fiction's content and its formal innovations as well, exemplify a Marxist writer seriously committed to his craft, it also exhibits and thrives on the basic structural conflict between the individual and society at large. More specifically, instead of using fiction as a way to anxiously prove his commitment and belonging to the masses (as in the introspective style of much May Fourth fiction), he demonstrates the flaws and contradictions in such an approach on the surface of the narrative, thus inserting his work directly into reality, a field of play in which individuals are determined by the forces of history and society; in short, by their place in the crowd.

A significant aspect of Zhang Tianyi's presentation of these contradictions in human nature involves his narrative efforts to expunge the traces that mark the authorial presence of self, a process that, in Marston Anderson's words, "constitutes a definitive evacuation of the personal preoccupations" that prevent other leftist writers from connecting with the masses.[51] Zhang joined the Party at around the same time as Wang

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[49] Hsia, C.T. *A History of Modern Chinese Fiction*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971. 212.

[50] Ibid., 213.

[51] Marston Anderson, *The Limits of Realism*, 156.

Jingzhi and established himself as a writer in the late 1920s with the encouragement of Lu Xun. By the early 1930s, Zhang was an active member of the League of Left-Wing Writers and at the forefront of the campaign for literary massification. The Marxist literary critic Hu Feng 胡風 termed Zhang a "plain materialist" (*supu de weiwuzhuyizhe* 素樸的唯物主義者) to emphasize how Zhang, rather than investing his characters with ideological world-views, defines them through their behavior, contingent upon social circumstances and "the designs they harbor in their relations with others."[52] Anderson expounds on this point further:

> Eschewing both physical and psychological description, Zhang is forced to define character solely in terms of the individual's socially meaningful acts and intentions. … Actions are dictated by a purely situational logic. Characters struggle, not to remain true to internal psychological or ideological compulsions, but simply to maximize their control over whatever social circumstances present themselves.[53]

In Zhang Tianyi's narrative technique, this foregrounding of social relations and contingencies takes precedence over ideological or political expediency and provides the principle fount of contradiction and satire in his stories. Thus he also taps into one of the fundamental contradictions of the crowd, that is, as an assemblage of discrete individuals taken as a whole.

As these brief and incomplete generalizations on Zhang's work show, his approach to narrative both differs from the assumptions of most May Fourth-era fiction in the way it is invested in the forces of the modern masses to reveal contradiction in human behavior, as well as history. As such, Zhang's representation of the crowd is layered by its polyphonic outbursts and pre-ideological volatility. In the 1931 short story "Little

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[52] Hu Feng, quoted in Marston Anderson, *The Limits of Realism*, 163.

[53] Ibid., 163-164.

Peter" (*Xiao Bide* 小彼得), what begins as a simple parable of the righteous resentment of laborers at a factory ends instead on a note of moral ambivalence when their rage is directed toward the spoiled dog of the boss. When the workers capture the dog and try to make it eat its own feces, they accidentally kill it and, in their elation they cook and eat it. The crowd's proclivity toward excess contaminates their gratification: "They felt overjoyed. But on their way home, everyone was silent: there was something lacking in their joy, concealing a deep unease. 他們感到痛快. 可是在回家的路上，各人也就默然了：那痛快有點欠缺的，而且還隱藏著什麼不滿足。"[54] Zhang reveals a discomfiting undercurrent of violence in the crowd mentality whose moral authority he is simultaneously advocating.

Zhang Tianyi's writing of the crowd, moreover, goes beyond thematics. His 1932 short story, "Hatred" was among the first modern Chinese stories whose narration is diffused throughout the crowd. As briefly outlined above, "Hatred" involves a band of refugees in flight after their village was destroyed in the warlord campaigns. Their wandering in oppressive heat across a parched landscape forges a collective identity that Zhang narrates by way of a kind of heteroglossia: free of psychological introspection, the statements of the members of the group produce tension not just in terms of language (dispersed democratically through the crowd instead of centralized in a single or omniscient narrator), but challenges the boundaries of the individuals that compose the crowd. That is, Zhang's narrative language is not merely the means by which the crowd

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[54] Zhang Tianyi 張天翼. "Xiao Bide 小彼得" (Little Peter). *Zhang Tianyi wenji* 張天異文集 (Collected Works of Zhang Tianyi), Vol. 1. Shanghai: Shanghai wenyi chubanshe, 1985. 127.

is shaped and given a voice, it is also a process of constructing a crowd and pushing it beyond its own boundaries.

Along their way down the dusty, seemingly endless road through the barren environment, the group encounters four wounded soldiers. Upon hearing the desperate moans of the first, they initially assume it to be a ghost:

> In this whole world there is only this group of people, only the sky full of dirt, the land full of dirt, the flesh-colored sun. There isn't another living thing. Who could be crying, still hanging around this world? 這全世界只有他們一團人，只有滿天的黃土，滿地的黃土，肉紅色的太陽. 此外就沒有一個生物. 會有誰哭，誰還保在這世界裡？[55]

Traversing along the liminal frontier between the real and the spectral, the group discovers the young conscript, whipped to the brink of death left to die by his unit, begging for the group to put him of his misery. Examining his wounds, the group beholds the massing of ants on the man's body:

> On the man's back and chest are seven or eight gashes, the bloody red flesh pushed out and exposed. Millions and millions of ants swarm over the length of the wounds, swarm inside the several red troughs, picking his bloody flesh with their pincers; its hard to make out how deep the wounds are. The rest of his body is crawling with ants. … And this man isn't dead, with ants biting every ridge and hollow of him. 這男子背上胸上給砍了七八刀，帶血的紅肉翻出到外面，幾百萬幾千萬螞蟻堆在七八條刀傷上，堆在這些紅色的槽裡，用夾子啃著他的帶血的肉，連刀傷有多深都瞧不出了. 這男子可沒死，讓滿坑滿谷的的螞蟻啃著。[56]

The image of the ant swarm here, depicted in explicit detail, heightens the onlookers' revulsion and the young man's suffering, as well as the sense of hostility of their surroundings. Recalling Canetti's observation on the positive image of the horde of locusts depicted in the *Shi jing* (the swarm's "exemplary power of increase"), however, we may be able to discern something similar at work here. The power in the image, its potential to revolt, comes from the sheer number of ants on the man, an overwhelming

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[55] Zhang Tianyi, "Chouhen 仇恨" (Hatred), *Zhang Tianyi wenji*, Vol. 1, 313. English in Zhang Tianyi. "Hatred." Trans. Shu-ying Tsau. *Revolutionary Literature in Modern China: An Anthology*. Eds. John Berninghausen and Ted Huters. White Plains: M.E. Sharpe, 1976. 64.

[56] Zhang Tianyi, "Chouhen," 313-314. English in Zhang Tianyi, "Hatred," 64.

sensation of multitude transmitted to the onlookers: “Everyone’s flesh crawls: it seems as if their own heart and brain matter are teeming with so many ants. 大家的肉在顫著：彷佛自己的胸髓上，心臟上，也都爬著這麼多的螞蟻。”[57] The image is horrifying, yet also transformative; when a member of the crowd asks the wounded conscript who he is, he immediately realizes that the question no longer matters. The bounds of their individuality fall apart and assume a collective identity in which the distances between people, “imposed from outside,” are eliminated.[58]

Later, when the group comes across a group of three soldiers that were part of the contingent that destroyed their village, the group’s impulse is to kill them as brutally as possible. One refugee digs his teeth into the body of one of the soldiers before they decide to bury the three alive; everyone beats them as children pour dry, hot dirt over them. In the middle of this vengeful frenzy, however, one of the soldiers mentions his mother, and the group watches two of the soldiers help the third clean the maggots out of wound (similar the explicit description as the ants mentioned above). The refugees, made graphically aware of the extent of the soldiers’ suffering, brings them into their fold: “‘We all have the same hard luck, we have it the same, the same … We …’ He says ‘We!’ In the talk between the two groups this is the first use of the word – ‘We!’ ‘咱們都一樣受禍害，咱們一樣的那個，一樣的 … 咱們 …’ ‘咱們!’ 這兩團人的談話裡第一

[57] Zhang Tianyi, “Chouhen,” 314. English in Zhang Tianyi, “Hatred,” 64.

[58] Elias Canetti, *Crowds and Power*, 18.

次用這兩個字 — ‘咱們！’”[59] The violence that gives way to empathy, however, does not dissipate; the inclusive pronoun *zanmen* redirects the hatred indicated in the title to the unseen enemy that imposes arbitrary limitations on the crowd. The soldiers’ desire to obtain a submachine gun that they left behind also shapes the desire of the group. As they continue to walk down the road at the end of the story, the machine gun and the potential they see in it has replaced food as the principal object of desire:

> Together they pick up their blistered feet and make their way onward over the roasting hot grit. Whether there will be food at Liu Village doesn’t seem to be on their minds. They are simply walking. There is a constant hoarse-throated line: “Fuck your grandfather, we have to get some of those machine guns. 他們一同跨著起滿了水泡的腳，在燒燙的沙土上移著步子前進著. 到了劉家屯有沒有吃的，現在似乎沒想到它. 他們只是走著. 一句話老是嘎聲説著：‘操你爺爺，非得撈幾杆手提機關 …’[60]

This is the crowd in its process of coming into being, facing the abject and extinction by absorbing them into it. This is not to say that their desire for violence is without moral justification, but that the historical circumstances of the crowd’s legitimacy is bound together with the forces of massification.

Finally, there is an additional linguistic signifier drawing us into the crowd’s spectral shadow. Throughout the story, Old Man Hai 海老頭 responds to every development with barrage of curses, usually directed at someone’s ancestors. His comment, “I’ll fuck every damn one of your ancestors. 我操你舊了包堆的祖宗,” is repeated multiple times, though the object of his verbal assault seems to vary. Most often the old man wields the phrase as a mantra to express his frustration and grief (his wife

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[59] Zhang Tianyi, “Chouhen,” 330. English in Zhang Tianyi, “Hatred,” 69. In the story’s original publication, a footnote (reproduced in his *Collected Works*) explains the usage of *zanmen*. Ironically, Zhang explains in his note that he should provide this explanation for readers in the south, where *zanmen* is not part of the standard lexicon. While on one hand the word implies an inclusiveness that the narrative depends on, on the other hand the linguistic and geographical differences are at the same time re-inscribed through its use.

[60] Zhang Tianyi, “Chouhen,” 333-334. English in Zhang Tianyi, “Hatred,” 70. Translation modified.

Daniu'er 大妞兒 was raped and killed by marauding soldiers), but by the end of the story takes on a revolutionary quality, a rallying cry that marks the crowd's mission. More than merely the obscene ranting of a dispossessed old man, the utterance emanates from the intensities at this desolate frontier and acquires a political potency from the collective value it carries. The host of the "invisible dead" the old man calls out provides the ragged group of refugees a second, innumerable crowd to measure themselves against, one that keeps the living "in flight" and moving forward.[61] In this way, the refugees are already part of the "death crowd," and draw on its strength as way to expand into the real. Moreover, unlike Scholar Wang in "Human Meat," whose cannibalistic presence haunts modern Chinese history like a ghost, Old Man Hai threatens these invisible dead, a spectacular reversal of historical time to undo the repeated hauntings of the present.

Wu Zuxiang: The Crowd from Hell

Realist literature in China during the early to mid-1930s increasingly foregrounded the crowd image not only as a way for leftist writers to showcase the suffering and tribulations of the masses of China, but also as part of an effort to undertake a "massification" of literature. As mentioned above, massification depends on both a renovation of the content of fiction as well as the techniques of narration. At the same time, the portrayal of the masses as the chief protagonists of historical change often took the form of "blood and tears," in which the violence and death suffered by the common people was manifested with severe, and occasionally indulgent, acuity. This corporeal

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[61] Elias Canetti, *Crowds and Power*, 77.

investment in literature, designed to intensify its empathetic effect and revolutionary import, constitutes a fundamental element (or contradiction) of crowd formation: rather than diminishing the force of the crowd, massacre intensifies its symbolic power and promises its persistence in collective memory. Such violence, massacre, and haunting in literature contributes to the construction of a collective subjectivity, yet also undermines the utopian promise of revolution by proposing an iterative view of history, punctuated by repeated cases of bloodshed and sacrifice.

Having looked at the fictional endeavors of Wang Jingzhi and Zhang Tianyi to represent the crowd above, I now turn to another author of the 1930s to further illustrate the complex and uncanny relationship between the representation of violence done to the crowd and the violence of of representing the crowd. Like Wang and Zhang, Wu Zuxiang's writing style underwent a significant revision around the turn of the decade. Whereas his early short stories and vignettes depict the charming, pastoral flavor of his hometown Maolin, his later fiction exposes the underlying inequality and seething resentment just below the surface in such representations of rural China. Ban Wang notes a key moment in the development of socialist realism (*shehuizhuyi xianshizhuyi* 社會主義現實主義) in China as a shift to the portrayal of the "plight of the peasantry," and remarks that Wu Zuxiang's stories render an image of the countryside "shaped by the relations of exploitation, oppression, class stratification, money, and struggle."[62] Besides the structuring of many of his stories according to this Marxist framework, Wu also excelled at writing dialogue and imparting his crowds with a multiplicity of voices.

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[62] Wang, Ban. "Socialist Realism." *Words and Their Stories: Essays on the Language of the Chinese Revolution*. Ed. Ban Wang. Leiden: Brill, 2011. 111.

This technique of writing the crowd by distributing the narrative voice throughout the characters that populate it, as shown in my reading of Zhang Tianyi's story "Hatred" above, comes at the expense of any penetrating psychological revelation to be gained through a single or omniscient narrator. Rather, the story is advanced by the heteroglossic collection of voices through conversation, exclamation, and interjection. Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of dialogism conceives of language built upon the tension between the obligations to a "unitary language" (the "centripetal forces of language" that make shared communication possible within "a system of linguistic norms")[63] in the midst of a socializing and historicizing "heteroglossia" (consisting of "the centrifugal, stratifying forces").[64] The relevance of Bakhtin's idea to literary experimentation happening in the fiction of the early 1930s can be seen in these writers' attempts to overcome authorial singularity and compose stories nearly entirely from the voices of the crowd. These voices, often unattributed to specific characters, "find their identity," according to Marston Anderson, "only in the context of the crowd and its collective intentions."[65] The heteroglossic technique in these works renders the crowd as a vital and socializing force that, taken as a (non-totalizing) whole in the realm of the story, represents a carnivalesque form of resistance. These tensions in the Wu Zuxiang stories I examine below gradually build over the course of the work, precipitating by their end an eruption of violence.

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[63] Bakhtin, M.M. "Discourse in the Novel." *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*. Ed. Michael Holquist. Trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981. 270.

[64] Ibid., 272.

[65] Marston Anderson, *The Limits of Realism*, 185.

Perhaps the most famous Chinese story to employ this dialogic technique is Ding Ling's 丁玲 1931 work, "Flood" (Shui 水). In this story, discussed at greater length elsewhere,[66] a crowd of starving refugees displaced by floodwaters accumulates outside a nearby town, hoping for shelter and food from the gentry that live there. After being utterly disregarded and left to die, the crowd assumes the force of the flood that has forced them from their homes and farmland. Roused to action by the revolutionary logic of a half-naked young man, the story ends thusly:

> The resolute power of his hoarse, sorrowful voice carried to those both near and far and galvanized the hearts of the starving. With each sentence they became more invigorated, as if they had already realized all of this but had not found the right words to speak it. At this moment they were willing to follow his commands, united in their hearts and ready to give their life for that of everyone. This boundless promise filled their hearts.
>
> As the dawn broke in hazy glow, this regiment, this company of slaves, with the men at the lead and the women following quickly behind, in a galloping roar of life and ferocity even greater than the flood's, pushed toward the town.
>
> 這嘶著的沈痛的聲音帶著雄厚的力從近處傳到遠處，把一些餓著的心都鼓動起來了。而且他的每一句話語，都喚醒了他們，都是他們意識到而還沒有找到恰當的字眼說出來的話語。他們在這個時候，甘心的聽著他的指揮，他們是一條心，把這條命交給大家，充滿在他們心上的，是無限大的光明。
>
> 於是天將朦朦亮的時候，這隊人，這隊飢餓的奴隸，男人走在前面，女人也跟著跑，吼著生命的奔放，比水還凶猛的，朝鎮上撲過去。[67]

The polyphony of voices now united in a single roar, the crowd adopts the characteristics like a totem and acquires its unstoppable force. Shortly after the publication of Ding Ling's story, prominent critic Feng Xuefeng 馮雪峰 heralded the birth of a new kind of fiction that can "firstly focus attention on the masses' own power, and secondly is convinced of the masses' ability to change. 首先著眼到大眾自己的力量，其次相信大

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[66] See for example Marston Anderson, *The Limits of Realism*, 184-187; C.T. Hsia, *A History of Modern Chinese Fiction*, 268-272; and Feuerwerker, Yi-tse Mei. *Ding Ling's Fiction: Ideology and Narrative in Modern Chinese Literature*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982. 66-68. Feuerwerker also notes in a footnote ostensibly agreeing with C.T. Hsia's scathing criticism of "Flood" as unrealistic that such a far-fetched notion of a group of starving and exhausted people taking a granary by force depends on a degree of "reiteration" in its revolutionary theme. She writes, "The myth of revolution is reinforced by the myth of resurrection." See 160-161 fn37.

[67] Ding Ling 丁玲. "Shui 水" (Flood). *Ding Ling wenji* 丁玲文集 (Collected Works of Ding Ling), Vol. 2. Changsha: Hunan renmin chubanshe, 1982. 406.

眾是會轉變的。”[68] While Ding Ling's radically collectivized narrative technique opened up new possibilities and certainly influenced other leftist writers, including Zhang Tianyi and Wu Zuxiang, it would be a mistake to regard either of these authors' works as simply derivative.

Wu Zuxiang's short story "Eighteen Hundred Piculs," while reminiscent of Ding Ling's "Water" in terms of its narrative style, nevertheless takes a very different perspective, in addition to being written with more authenticity in terms of the voices it employs. The story, subtitled "A Sketch of the July 15 Meeting at the Song Family Ancestral Temple" (Qiyue shiwuri Songshi dazongci suxie 七月十五日宋氏大宗祠速寫), relates the squabbles of the powerful Song clan over how to deal with the eighteen hundred piculs of rice that were set aside following the last harvest. Song Botang 宋柏堂, entrusted with the management of the family farm, waits nervously for the representatives of the numerous families to arrive so that they can officially convene the meeting to decide the fate of the rice. As the clan members trickle in, the crowd image is enlarged through the number of voices debating which use to put the rice toward, but Wu's technique grows more cacophonous; each member has designs on the rice and advocates his own benefit above all else. The details of the clan members' individual machinations pile up and confusion reigns. Botang attempts to keep things in order by reassuring everyone that the meeting will begin as soon as one Old Uncle Yuezhai 月齋老叔, seemingly the only clan member capable of settling the competing factions, arrives.

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[68] Feng Xuefeng 馮雪峰. "Guanyu xin de xiaoshuo de dansheng: ping Ding Ling de 'Shui' 關於新的小說的誕生 — 評丁玲的《水》" (On the Birth of a New Fiction: An Appraisal of Ding Ling's 'Flood'." Feng Xuefeng xuanji: lunwen bian 馮雪峰選集：論文編 (Selections by Feng Xuefeng: On Literature). Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2003. 8.

Before Yuezhai turns up, however, a crowd of starving and rebellious tenant farmers break into the ancestral temple and ransack the rice.

More than ninety percent of the story is devoted to the various conversations and increasingly heated arguments over what to do with the rice. Each of the participants schemes to gain control over the grain for his own purpose, whether paying off debts, funding the local school, purchasing equipment for the local militia, making sure that funeral expenses are covered, or using it to finance irrigation projects. Some clan members simply want to divide the grain equally between the various families. The discussions and arguments tend to consist primarily of quoted speech; only minimal description augments the disputes. Compared to the presentation of similarly structured dialogue in "Flood," the discourse in Wu Zuxiang's story possesses more individuation — C.T. Hsia notes "at least a dozen deft sketches of the family members assembled at the hall" — and authenticity.[69] Interspersed with dialogues on medicine, cricket fighting, and shrewish wives are allusions to the contemporary financial turmoil, foreign aggression into Chinese territory, and growing unrest among the students and in the surrounding countryside. Yet the types of language the clan members employ also indicate a oblivious and antiquated adherence to convention and traditional custom. When one Ziyu 子漁 suggests "communizing" (*lai ge gongchan* 來個共產) the grain and land, for example, he is reprimanded by Buqing 步青, a tofu shop owner:

> "Ziyu, someone proposed this idea of yours long ago. But for you to publicly suggest it in the ancestral temple? You're no heir to the Song family name! I'm in worse straits than you, but I wouldn't dare carry out such a insolent scheme. Your have no conscience whatsoever, nor any family loyalty!"
>
> Ziyu, resting his head on the back of the 'grandfather chair,' continued to grin. After a moment, he sat up and exclaimed:

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[69] C.T. Hsia, *A History of Modern Chinese Fiction*, 283.

> "Old Man, we're standing before the family gods here, so swear by putting your finger up your ass: Do you or don't you want to divide up the estate? If you lie you're not you parents' son!"
>
> "No conscience, no family loyalty!"
>
> "子漁，你這個話，早就有人這麼倡，可是你今天公然在祠堂裡說，你不是個姓宋的子孫！我比你窮，我就不敢作這個非分之目的。你這話太沒良心，太沒宗旨。"
>
> 子漁把頭靠在太師椅背上，繼續張著嘴笑；笑了好一會，坐直了，說：
>
> "老頭子，在'家堂菩薩'面前，這是。你老哥摳屁眼賭個咒。分義莊，你心裡想不想？說謊的不是好爺娘扯的！"
>
> "太沒良心，太沒宗旨。"[70]

This exchange colloquially illustrates the mixture of outworn phrasing and self-serving reasoning that permeates nearly the entire story. The constant reference to the clan's ancestors, together with descriptions of the dilapidated state of the ancestral temple where the story is set, signals how far the family has declined. The nostalgic pretense of power cannot conceal that more than a few of the clan representatives are facing some dire choices; their opportunism, while ingrained into the class consciousness the represent, also serves the practical function of ensuring their own survival in the midst of the famine.

Wu Zuxiang's skill at writing such cynical and manipulative banter also serves to create a different sort of collectivity than the kind exhibited in the narrative techniques seen above in Zhang Tianyi or Ding Ling. Whereas their stories use discourse within on the narrative surface to figure the undifferentiated collective (and also incite the reader into the fold), Wu Zuxiang is proposing multiple levels of collective consciousness. Besides the rebellious crowd that seizes control of the narrative at the end of the story (discussed below), the bulk of the story is devoted to the failure of the Song clan to look beyond their own selfish interests. Their purpose of gathering at the ancestral temple is to find common purpose and decide a course of action, but their internecine bickering

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[70] Wu Zuxiang 吳組緗. "Yiqian babai dan 一千八百擔" (Eighteen Hundred Piculs). *Wu Zuxiang xiaoshuo sanwen ji* 吳組緗小說散文集 (A Collection of Wu Zuxiang's Fiction and Prose). Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1954. 91.

prevents any possibility of agreement and instead sets them up as a perfect foil to the crowd of united tenant farmers. An additional layer of collectivity is the evocation of the Song ancestors. Their silent presence permeates the atmosphere of the story, lending it both the sense of familial degradation and ruin throughout the story, as well as the carnivalesque upheaval that occurs at the end. A comment from Old Xinqiao 鑫樵老 bemoans the family's decline:

> In the old days when one of the Song clan went out into the world, they were perfectly presentable, dignified, and courteous. Our ancestral temple in those days held three small sacrifices a month, and two large sacrifices a year. As the descendants entered, they arranged themselves each according their generation, some sitting, some standing. They followed the correct procedure for senior and junior, and the right order for old and young. If the elders weren't speaking, no one from the younger generation dared make a peep. But now what are things like? It's like a herd of grazing cattle! 從前姓宋的走出一個人來，都是像模像樣，有貌有禮的。那時候詞堂裡每月三小祭，每年二大祭。子孫走進來，按輩分，坐的坐,站的站：尊卑有次，長幼有序。老輩子不開已，小輩子那個敢哼一口氣？而今是個甚麼樣子？簡直是個放牛場了！[71]

These different layers of collective groupings, placed along a temporal trajectory, are in competition with one another in an ancient contest for supremacy. The persistence of the contest in rural China, the antagonism between the levels of traditional hierarchy, changes our perspective on the climactic moment at the close of the story. Placing the Song family in the middle of these two masses, one living and one dead, creates the crucial tension that explodes in popular violence at the climactic moment of the story.

In a neat reversal of the ending of Ding Ling's story, the tenant farmer revolt in "Eighteen Hundred Piculs" suggests a vigorous, carnivalesque momentum absent from the rest of the story. While anticipation builds throughout the languid and stifling pace of the clan meeting (which never officially begins due to Old Uncle Yuezhai's absence), the appearance of the farmers on the third-to-last page of the story shocks both the family

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[71] Wu Zuxiang, "Yiqian babai dan," 103-104.

elders and the reader. The violent riot begins, in contrast to the endless dialogue of the various clan members, with an explosion of noise. Dressed like demons amid the clamor, the crowd seizes Botang and the head of the village militia and drags them onto a stage set up for sacrifices to the Dragon King (*longwang* 龍王), while outside the gates more people, including members of the Song family, stream into the temple compound with baskets for carrying rice. The story ends with the temple caretaker, Shuangxi 雙喜, crying over the wonton destruction:

> "Our ancestors! ..."
> The two big stone lions merely laughed at him, laughing as if they couldn't catch their breath.
> "太祖爺爺呀!……"
> 兩只大石獅向著他打哈哈，像打得氣也喘不過來的樣子。[72]

Shuangxi's plaintive cry for the ancestors may seem to fall on deaf ears, but the story's final sentence suggests that they may also be in on the joke.

C.T. Hsia calls the uprising at the end of "Eighteen Hundred Piculs" a "cheap trick," which allows him to rail against the conventions of proletarian fiction in similar judgment as his trenchant criticism of Ding Ling's "Flood."[73] Given the framework of multiple collective entities I discuss above, the riot that closes Wu's story may be differentiated despite its shared thematic similarities with other revolutionary fiction. Philip F. Williams makes the important point that, rather than "a spontaneous mob action," the storming of the Song ancestral temple appears to be well-organized and premeditated.[74] The form the riot takes, however, is suggestive of a more traditional,

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[72] Wu Zuxiang, "Yiqian babai dan," 116.

[73] C.T. Hsia, *A History of Modern Chinese Fiction*, 284.

[74] Williams also cites a paragraph from the original text (excised from subsequent publications of the story) in which a young revolutionary shouts slogans from the stage. See Williams, Philip F. *Village Echoes: The Fiction of Wu Zuxiang*. Boulder: Westview Press, 1993. 94-95.

even religiously theatrical, mode of popular uprising. The peasant farmers' attack coincides with the Ghost Festival (*Yulanpeng hui* 盂蘭盆會), a traditional Buddhist holiday during which it is thought that the realm of hell opens up, allowing the "hungry ghosts" (*egui* 餓鬼) of the dead to receive food and nourishment.[75] The tenant farmers, gaunt and haggard in the midst of the drought, resemble the hungry ghosts seeking sustenance; Wu notes that "some had used coal ash and lime to make different kinds of devil masks, while others carried baskets and woven buckets on their heads leaped about like the demons in the Mulian plays. 有的脸上用烟煤石灰涂成各种的鬼脸子；有的把筲箩畚箕什么的戴在头上，学着 "目莲戏" 中小鬼那么一晃一闪地蹲跳着。" Traversing the boundary between the living and the dead, the starving peasants enact their rebellion against the Song elders as a material manifestation of the "invisible dead."

Wu imparts his rebellious crowd with a ghoulish quality that evokes a Bakhtinian carnival more than the awakening of a political consciousness. David Der-wei Wang notes that the hellish version of justice in the story recalls "its premodern, even prefeudal form" more than the modern interpretation.[76] The kind of ancient form of collective retribution that continues to haunt the present implies that, for Wu, revolution is drawing upon more than just ideology in its promulgation. Rather than breaking free of the suffocating obligations to tradition, the revolution harnesses the popular energy generated in carnivalesque violence for its own purposes. Massification, in this sense, calls upon a

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[75] For an thorough study of the history and practice of the Ghost Festival in China, see Teiser, Stephen F. *The Ghost Festival in Medieval China*.

[76] David Der-wei Wang, *The Monster That Is History*, 65.

host of demons and ghosts as a spectral double of the revolutionary crowd and source of collective imagination.

In this chapter I have outlined three strategies of invoking the crowd vis-à-vis its spectral double, the death crowd. In Wang Jingzhi's "Human Meat," collective action transforms into mass hysteria and cannibalism, producing an ever expanding "heap of the dead." Wang's story posits the birth of the modern Chinese historical subject in the encounter with the slaughtered multitude, not heroically rising above the carnage, but burying itself under the heap as a kind of sacrificial ruse. In Zhang Tianyi's "Hatred," the nascent crowd, set adrift amongst the arbitrary, warring divisions, coalesces around collective spirit through the potential of the crowd to wreak havoc, not just on the social forces that impose these divisions between people but on the ghosts of the past as well. Zhang utilizes a grammar of crowds, both inclusive and transgressive, to narrate this collectivism coming into being. Finally, Wu Zuxiang's "Eighteen Hundred Piculs" anticipates the revolutionary moment not as a awakening of political consciousness, but a carnivalesque rebellion of devils and ghosts. Instead of historical progress toward a realization of revolutionary utopia, the tenant farmers stage a sacrifice in the manner of the demons of the past haunting the present. Each of these works testifies to how the endeavor of literary massification in the late 1920s and early 1930s conjures an image of the crowd that cannot but evoke the specter of violence, death, and the ghosts of the past, even as it projects the revolutionary future.

CHAPTER THREE
THE MASS ORNAMENT:
VISUALIZING MASSES IN REPUBLICAN AND REVOLUTIONARY CHINA

Introduction: The Crowd as Medium

Part One of this dissertation primarily focused on the literary figure of the crowd. Chapter One looked at the role of the crowd in the self-construction of the modern intellectual, while Chapter Two expanded upon the term "massification" to describe the doubling effect of the crowd imagination in literary representation of violence and death. Part Two turns to the visual representation of the crowd in film, along with propaganda art and posters, to argue for an explicit relationship between the modern image and mass. More specifically, I am interested in exploring the technological medium that facilitates the production of the crowd in image and the reproduction of the masses. Not only does the technology of reproduction, in the words of Walter Benjamin, bring the masses "face to face with themselves," but catalyzes a mutually constitutive and reinforcing association.[1] In the context of modern China, the simultaneous emergence of technologies of reproduction and the propagation of collective and revolutionary ideologies is more than coincidental; each is implied in, and indeed expanded by, the other.

This chapter examines various visualizations of the crowd in political film and propaganda art produced in China over the course of roughly four decades of history, from the era of silent film in the early 1930s to the peak of the Cultural Revolution in the late 1960s. Each work was produced in response to specific historical circumstances and

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[1] Benjamin, Walter. "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." *Illuminations*, 251fn21.

carries a clear ideological motivation, usually presented on the work's surface. The primary concern of this chapter is not this overt message of collectivity, nor do my readings of specific works attempt to locate any hidden, below-the-surface counter-message. Indeed, simplicity and obviousness are essential to the function of propaganda art. Rather, I am reading these works within their respective historical and imagistic contexts partly with the intent of showing their unintended, disjunctive effects. While the ideological meaning of most propaganda is readily apparent, a different set of critical tools are necessary to draw out and explain its impact. Therefore, besides my analysis of the crowd image in specific examples of each medium of work, special attention is paid to the means of production, techniques of representation, and features of reproducibility. Each of these media represents a visual, aesthetic form particularly modern in its conception and form, and each is designed to communicate with a mass audience and at the level of the mass. The remarkable reciprocity between the forms these images take and the manifestations of crowds in reality speaks to the potent power of art not only to ideologically persuade, but also to shape our own perception and experience of history.

This chapter features three sections, including close readings of two films and a more general overview of propaganda art. My first example is the 1934 silent film *Big Road* (Dalu 大路, dir. Sun Yu 孫瑜), one of the most celebrated examples of the retrospectively termed Left-Wing Cinema Movement (*Zuoyi dianying yundong* 左翼電影運動).[2] The group protagonist of the film and collective message, together with its

[2] Laikwan Pang points out that the term *zuoyi dianying yundong* was not in use during the 1930s, and was inaugurated with the publication of *The Development of Chinese Cinema* (Zhongguo dianying fazhan shi 中國電影發展史), "a project supported by the communist government in the late 1950s with the aim of glorifying the political achievement of the left-wing filmmakers and critics in the Nationalist period (1912-1949)." See Pang, Laikwan. *Building a New China in Cinema: The Chinese Left-wing Cinema Movement, 1932-1937*. Boulder: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2002. 3-4.

horrifying scene of mass death at the conclusion, suggests a cinematic transposition of the techniques of massification in narrative fiction (described in Chapter Two). The distinctively filmic techniques utilized throughout the film, and in particular in the climactic scene of the crowd's resurrection, suggest an uniquely visual mode of representation that generates the crowd as a cinematic "effect." In the second section, I look at the 1962 film *Prairie Fire* (Liaoyuan 燎原, dirs. Gu Eryi 顧而已 and Zhang Junxiang 張駿祥), a dramatic reenactment of the Great Strike of Anyuan (*Anyuan da bagong* 安源大罷工) four decades earlier. The glory of the originary myth of workers' solidarity depicted in the sublime images of united crowds is displaced by the volatility of contemporary turf wars in the political arena. The third section of this chapter looks at the image of crowds as illustrated in the propaganda art and posters of the Cultural Revolution. The overwhelming and pervasive image of the revolutionary masses we see in these posters, reproduced and distributed on a massive scale, constitutes a mode of propagation that seeks to achieve a profoundly reciprocal relationship with the viewing public.

American novelist Don DeLillo once remarked on the relationship between images and crowds that "An image is a crowd in a way, a smear of impressions. Images tend to draw people together, create mass identity."[3] The problems of representing the crowd, he suggests, are bound to the creation and effects of images. The question of "the masses" is itself an issue of representation, both in the sense of how to capture the abstract of it in graphic terms, as well as in the related categories of the emerging

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[3] DeLillo, Don. "The Image and the Crowd." *Creative Camera* 231 (April 1993). 72-73.

sovereignty and agency of the crowd. In other words, we are not just wondering how crowds are shown in images, but also how the crowd is transmitted through the image, and vice versa. Raymond Williams provocatively claims in *Culture and Society* that "there are in fact no masses; there are only ways of seeing people as masses," suggesting that the role images play in constructing the concept of the masses is evident through their media itself.[4] That is, the masses are demonstrated through "mass-communication" itself, a practice that Williams emphasizes "is not only transmission; it is also reception and response."[5] The ideal effect of the propaganda image is not merely to indoctrinate, but to generate communication between image and viewer. Haun Saussy notes that "a perfect circuit is established if only the receiver will recognize his or her desires as having been expressed, or anticipated, in the art work: the proper response is 'Yes!'"[6] The visual depiction of the crowd, therefore, depends on more than just the message it carries, but the means of its dissemination.

This approach to the study of the crowd figure in visual culture opens the very status of "image" to question. On one hand, the interpretive techniques of "iconology" help us consider the crowd as an object of visual representation and tease out differences in its depiction across a range of works. W.J.T. Mitchell helpfully reads iconology as "not just the science of icons, but the political psychology of icons, the study of iconophobia, iconophilia, and the struggle between iconoclasm and idolatry."[7] The image

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[4] Williams, Raymond. *Culture and Society 1780-1950*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1958. 300.

[5] Ibid., 313.

[6] Haun Saussy, "Crowds, Number, and Mass in China," 259.

[7] Mitchell, W.J.T. *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986. 3.

of the crowd vis-à-vis the portrayal of Mao Zedong, in particular, invites this kind of reading, replete with the simultaneous overtones of religious reverence and rebellious destruction. As I argue below, Mao and the crowd have their own reciprocal, constitutive relationship that projects a sense of wholeness and plentitude on each other. On the other hand, given the way propaganda art involves a performative response that integrates the propaganda image into viewer's own capacity to produce images and project himself or herself into the crowd in the poster, we also want to consider the distinct role of "media" that supports and conveys the propaganda image and connects it to the production of such mental images. The medium, as explained by the art historian Hans Belting, is distinct from both "image" and "picture." He writes,

> I propose to speak of image and medium as two sides of the same coin, though they split our gaze and mean different things. *The picture is the image with a medium*. The latter, understood in this way, encompasses both 'form' and 'matter,' which are discrete concepts when we talk about works of art and aesthetic objects. [...] [The picture] requires a spectator who is able to animate the media as though images were living things. Image perception, a form of animation, is a symbolic act that is guided by cultural patterns and pictorial technologies.[8]

Belting's anthropological approach accounts for the cultural, historical, and political conditioning of both the production of representational objects (or "picture-making") and their reception, which he sees in explicitly corporeal terms, in the triad of "image-medium-body."[9] The resonance he locates between the transmission of the image, or "whatever it is that gives visibility to the image,"[10] and the bodily act of spectatorship is especially helpful in determining the impacts and effects of propaganda art, where the media of the mass and collective perception cannot be so easily distinguished.

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[8] Belting, Hans. *An Anthropology of Images: Picture, Medium, Body*. Trans. Thomas Dunlap. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011. 10-11.

[9] Ibid., 15.

[10] Ibid.

What I am proposing is that the figure of the crowd in the visual media of revolutionary China is more than just an ideological object to be represented as such, but an embodiment of the collective impulse that corresponds with the medium of its transmission. In this way, the crowd image represents not only a call for revolutionary action, but also the very technological means that bring it into being. Put simply, the crowd serves as both message and the medium. Propaganda posters, for example, serve precisely the same recursive function that characterizes the open-ended expansion of the crowd, at once showing the crowd in an ideal state of wholeness and inviting the participation of its viewers. Within this dynamic, one may wonder whether the crowd actually exists, or if it is a just a byproduct of technological development. I am arguing that inasmuch the crowd is present in historical reality, the way that is comes to metonymically stand for and embody the notion of the masses is part of this visual and perceptive operation. From this perspective, the Chinese crowd in revolutionary times is a product of the intersection between the visual imagination of corporeal collectivity and the mass reproductive techniques of technology. What's more, Belting's theory, which endows the body with the same image-producing qualities of the medium, is based on his study of funeral images, in which the "lost body" is exchanged for a "virtual" one.[11] "In their own right, images testify to the absence that which they make present," he writes, "By virtue of the media in which they are produced, they already *own* the very presence that they are meant to transmit."[12] The interaction between the viewing crowd and the crowd depicted in the propaganda work is supported by a self-repeating, machine-like

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[11] Ibid., 3.

[12] Ibid., 6.

exchange of gazes and projections, furthering the (inevitable disjunctive) transformation of the ostensible object of representation into the subject of revolutionary history.

The technological means of the crowd's coming into being is also the subject of Siegfried Kracauer's 1927 essay "The Mass Ornament." While Kracauer's short piece is often read today as an ominous harbinger of the fascist aesthetics of the Nazis, this strictly political sense of his term is limiting. For Kracauer, the geometrical forms and mechanized repetitions popularly used in cabaret dance troupes convey not substance or meaning, but form itself: "The ornament is an *end in itself*," he declares, its purpose being to "train the broadest mass of people in order to create a pattern of undreamed-of dimensions."[13] The crowd image as an ornament in this sense, though empty of specific meaning, nevertheless manages to transmit a social ideology through the detail of form. "What is it that they, like an image become flesh, embody?" he asks in a later essay, "The *functioning* of a flourishing economy."[14] Rather than merely a political symbol, what the ordered crowd makes manifest is the process of its organization, subordinating the communication of its ideological message to the transmission of a form of being.

Kracauer's notion of ornament is instructive to my approach to the visual depiction of crowds in revolutionary China, but it would be a mistake to merely assert that these visual materials "reflect" a social or psychological order. My approach to propaganda art and mass ornament in the crowd image is based on historical

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[13] Kracauer, Siegfried. *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays*. Trans. Thomas Y. Levin. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995. 76-77.

[14] Kracauer, Siegfried. "Girls and Crisis." *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook*. Eds. Anton Kaes, Martin Jay, and Edward Dimendberg. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994. 565. In this essay, written following the global economic crash, Kracauer also notes that the "The effect achieved by these nice girls has to be termed ghostly."

contextualization that recognizes the disjunctive and unintended effects of pictorial representation. The Cultural Revolution, discussed at the end of this chapter, was in many ways a triumph of the crowd image, a time when crowds not only adorned the walls of nearly every public space, but were made manifest in constant political rallies, assemblies, and parades. Rather than congruence between the impossibly utopian picture and the reality it is meant to generate, however, the Cultural Revolution stands as the prime example of the volatility and excess of crowd behavior, marked with repeated horrifying spectacles of public beatings, executions, torture, and gang warfare, each carried out in the name of revolution. The constant collision between the the revolutionary crowd in the art of the Cultural Revolution of and the terrible aftereffects of this "smear of impressions" speaks to not only to the seductive power of the aesthetic experience, but also the disjunctive, irrational and violent possibilities latent in the crowd and its imagination.

The visual representation of a crowd notoriously became an object of modern critical reflection in Lu Xun's famous 1923 preface to *A Call to Arms* . Lu Xun recalls how, at the end of one of his microbiology classes in Japan, the instructor showed a lantern slide depicting the execution by the Japanese of a Chinese man accused of spying for the Russians during the Russo-Japanese War. Horrified by the apparent apathy on the faces of the spectators visible within the image, Lu Xun decided to quit his medical studies in order to focus instead on trying to heal the spirit of China through literature. Reading the crowd as synecdochically representative of the Chinese populace in general, Lu Xun concludes, "An ignorant and backwards citizenry, no matter how strong and

healthy their bodies may be, can only serve as the materials and onlookers of such meaningless public spectacles."[15] The scene of a *shizhong* (literally, "public warning" or "spectacle") appears repeatedly in Lu Xun's fiction, serving as a leitmotif as well as an exhortation. Lu Xun admonishes the crowd by revealing it in the mirror of his fiction, effectively re-figuring the transitive sense of the verb-object binome ("remonstrating the crowd [by exposing someone to it]") into a passive one ("making the crowd visible").[16] The visual dynamic at work in Lu Xun's utilization of the *shizhong*, which situates the crowd simultaneously as both the subject of exposure (the "materials," or *cailiao* 材料) and the object of demonstration (the audience of "onlookers," or *kanke* 看客) would become the crucial contradiction embedded in the depiction of crowds in Chinese visual culture over the coming decades. Taking this tension between spectacle and spectator as a starting point, this chapter looks at how the crowd is summoned to interpellate, produce, and galvanize audiences. To this end, I follow this general introduction to my approach of crowd images with an examination of the technological means and cinematic modes of their depiction in film.

Rey Chow's valuable reading of the lantern slide incident brings focus to the disorienting power of the "technologized visuality."[17] The shock that Lu Xun recounts is not merely a crystallization of his despair over his country's plight, she argues, but also a consequence of "the process of magnification and amplification that is made possible by

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[15] Lu Xun, "*Nahan* zixu," *Lu Xun quanji*, Vol. 1, 417.

[16] See my discussion in Chapter 1.

[17] Rey Chow, *Primitive Passions,* 4-11.

the film medium."[18] In 1896, a decade before Lu Xun's encounter with the projected crowd image, Gustave Le Bon, in his famously paranoid and prophetic treatise on crowd psychology, *The Crowd*, similarly finds in the magic lantern an ominously powerful medium for transmitting ideas to the masses due to the crowd's innate ability to uncritically absorb images: "Crowds being only capable of thinking in images are only to be impressed by images. It is only images that terrify or attract them and become motives of action."[19] Le Bon's foreboding sense of the coming "era of crowds,"[20] as with the urgency in Lu Xun's task of reforming the Chinese crowd, is inextricable from the emerging technologies of the projected image.

The Filmic Crowd: A Cinematic Effect

The same year of Le Bon's treatise, the Lumière brothers began screening projected motion pictures, and over the course of the next several decades, cinema would transform from a popular and novel entertainment to full-fledged mass medium. This transformation would also spur the proliferation of crowd images, from the spectacular and crowded Hollywood battle scenes of *Birth of a Nation* (dir. D.W. Griffith, 1915) to the dialectical and heroic collective forms in *The Battleship Potemkin* (dir. Sergei Eisenstein, 1925).[21] Anxiety and enthusiasm over film's potential as an object of

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[18] Ibid., 6.

[19] Le Bon, Gustave. *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind*. New York: The MacMillan Co., 1896. 57. Le Bon's monograph was translated into Chinese as early as 1920 as *Qunzhong xinli* 群眾心理 by Wu Xuchu 吳旭初 and Du Shiye 杜師業.

[20] Ibid., xv.

[21] For readings of these two films in these terms, see Tratner, Michael. *Crowd Scenes: Movies and Mass Politics*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2008.

collective spectatorship precipitated a discourse of a mass politics in film that conceives of the crowd not merely as a visible element in film, but as a collective — and collectivizing — compulsion both on and off the screen. The relationship here is more than coincidental; from the visual and narrative content of many films, to the technical apparatus of projection, to the architectural space of the theater that allows for collective reception, crowds are an effect of film as much as they enable the cinematic experience itself.

At the level of the visible, the crowd as onscreen motif projects a particular historiographic vision; embedded in its image is a specific historical rendering of the crowd, from the egalitarian union struggling for revolution, to the unruly mob threatening to throw society into the tumult of a darker, more barbaric past, to the masses of capitalist consumption, dreaming of the technology of bourgeois living. The apparatus, as well, mirrors the proliferation of crowds at the turn of and in the first decades of the twentieth century. Cinematic technology that process still images through the operations of mechanical reproduction and spectacular projection may also be thought of as a procedure for social transformation through the introduction and mobilization of the modern "technology" of the masses. Walter Benjamin, in a footnote to his famous essay on the work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction, traces the connection between the developing technologies of photography, sound recording, and most importantly film, stating plainly, "Mass reproduction is aided especially by the reproduction of the masses."[22] Benjamin's keen pronouncement figures the crowd as audience into reception

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[22] Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," 251.

of film. Spectator theory has primarily argued for an individual, isolated viewer whose response to the film, has at most a "cellular" relationship to the rest of the audience — given that, as Vanessa Schwartz reminds us, "it is necessarily among a crowd that we find the cinematic spectator,"[23] this premise does little to account for the potential for mass persuasion or the production of mass fantasies that so many film theorists and cultural critics saw in film's early decades.

The anxious excitement expressed by filmmakers, critics, and politicians is rooted in film's ability to incite its audience. Perhaps most powerfully, it is in the interaction of these three structural levels of content, form, and apparatus, that something resembling a crowd is produced; here I am thinking of something like what early French film theorists called *photogénie*, referring to the uncanny sense of aesthetic possibility in film that marks it as an art rather than just a mechanical novelty.[24] That is, based on a mechanical system of the reproduction, film's latent potential for the enhancement of vision is bound together with its capacity as a "mass" medium. *Photogénie* in this sense constitutes a form of aesthetic engagement that corresponds to a collective subjectivity rather than an individual one, and even, as Nina Lara Rosenblatt writes, renders "mass itself as a kind of technological form, a machine whose energies could similarly be directed toward the apprehension of specific objects and images."[25] Yet, the experience of this "afterimage" in film, similar to the psychological workings of a crowd in the way that it unites the

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[23] Schwartz, Vanessa R. *Spectacular Realities: Early Mass Culture in Fin-de-Siècle Paris*. Berkeley, University of California Press, 1999. 179.

[24] See Epstein, Jean. "On Certain Characteristics of *Photogénie*." Trans. Tom Milne. *Afterimage* 10 (Autumn 1981). 20-23.

[25] Rosenblatt, Nina Lara. "Photogenic Neurasthenia: On Mass and Medium in the 1920s." *October* 86 (August 1998). 55.

perspectives of its individual members, is produced at the most basic level by difference and invisibility: the spaces between the frames that comprise the magical effect of movement also confer on film a sense of the spectral, a haunting reminder of what Raymond Bellour calls "the stop of death."[26] The cinematic doubling that happens here, the sense of reality transposed into the phantasmagoria of the film, does not simply animate the audience in the model of the crowd it depicts on the screen; rather, film becomes, as Gilberto Perez pits it, "a dream that reclaims reality,"[27] creating an imaginary of the crowd already ghosted.

The production of the sense of unity in a crowd is, therefore, projected. Represented onscreen, the crowd in film can become a mirror through which the audience recognizes itself as a collective. The identification process, however, reproduces the sense of collectivity as a spectacular dreamworld: "They know themselves not only as the subject, the audience, but as the object, the spectacle, the movie," writes Rey Chow.[28] The cinematic image of the crowd mediates the relationship between the body politic as such and as it is imagined. The medium of film and how it connects to its audience have helped make cinema a pivotal arena for the production of the crowd, both in the sense of its collective reception and its reproducibility. A genealogy of the figure of the crowd in history should not only focus on how it has come into existence within discursive

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[26] Raymond Bellour, quoted in Mulvey, Laura, *Death 24x a Second: Stillness and the Moving Image*. London: Reaktion Books, 2006. 32.

[27] Perez, Gilberto. *The Material Ghost: Films and Their Medium*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998. 27.

[28] Rey Chow, *Primitive Passions*, 33. For an intriguing reading of crowd transformation from revolutionary to commoditized in Fritz Lang's 1927 classic *Metropolis*, see Kaes, Anton. "Movies and Masses." *Crowds*. Eds. Jeffrey T. Schnapp and Matthew Tiews. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006. 149-157.

categories at the junction of the historical and the political, but also must account for the collective compulsions embedded in the media of film itself.

The development of modernity in China has been tightly correlated with the construction of a "new people," a crucial effort, as illustrated in Lu Xun's famous anecdote mentioned above, in intellectual and artistic activities since the beginning of the twentieth century. From the politically conscious movies of the Left-wing Cinema Movement that emerged in the 1930s, to the socialist realist propaganda of the Maoist era, to the apex of the visual imaginary of the crowd during the Cultural Revolution, we can trace a trajectory of the crowd image that follows a narrative of collective enlightenment and emancipation, from the backwards group of spectators drawn to the cruel theater of corporeal punishment in Lu Xun's slideshow to the sublime union of the masses under the banner of Mao Zedong Thought (*Mao Zedong sixiang* 毛澤東思想). But it would be a mistake to assign a linear course of evolution to the concept of "the people" in Chinese aesthetic discourse. Questions such as who belongs to "the masses," how they are imagined and envisioned, and who holds the authority to speak on their behalf, are constantly subject to the political vicissitudes and historical contingencies of specific points in time.

My approach to the crowd seeks to complicate and undermine the received narrative of Chinese film history, rather than to confirm it. I choose to foreground the figure of the *crowd* rather than that of the *people* or the *masses* precisely because of the productive slippage between these terms; whereas the latter terms imply a totalizing (and politically reified) abstraction of national ethos, the "crowd," through its indeterminate

and even dangerous volatility, lays bare the contestations and struggles entailed in the ongoing process of collectively defining China. Moving the crowd from Lu Xun's object of remonstration to Mao's heroically manifested subject on the film screen and in poster is a process in which the spectacular image invariably projects a kind of afterimage. The crowd, as conceived in the following two sections (as well as in Chapter 4), is a cinematic effect, in the fullest sense of the term: making use of the technological elements of film, it is a virtual representation on-screen that also seeks to produce off-screen collectivities.

I first look at two films from China, each produced in a different, and pivotal, period in the history of Chinese cinema, to suggest a lineage of the crowd image that, from its earliest expression, is already running up against the specter of its dematerialization. The films under discussion in this chapter and the next are not meant to comprise an exhaustive, or even representative list of movies with spectacular crowd scenes, but rather illuminate the power of the crowd image in both the political implications in their treatments of the crowd, as well as the implicit assumptions of film as a mass medium. In this way, the cinematic technology compels us to reckon with the crowd itself as a kind of projection, a filmic presence continually confronting its own disappearance.

By analyzing the emergence and exhibition of collective displays in film and considering film's role as a mass medium, I want to rethink the interaction between historical narrative, cinematic technology, and movie audience. Of course, countless more instances of the crowd image in Chinese cinema exist, and many of these fit neatly in an established narrative, both in the PRC and in the West, about the crowd's role in

Chinese society and history. I would like to focus my argument, however, on how crowd images have a way of evoking not only their own historical antecedents in a kind of lineage, but also tend to project their own erasure in an undercurrent of violence and potential for annihilation. The films discussed below each account for the possibility (or inevitability) of the dissolution and erasure of the crowd in its their depictions of it, thereby summoning the crowds as a kind of effect rather than merely a motif, whether through revolutionary sacrifice, ideological reification, or popular catharsis.

In my first example, the ghostly resurrection of the revolutionary crowd at the end of *Big Road* (Dalu 大路, dir. Sun Yu 孫瑜, 1934) marks the emergence of a socially progressive film consciousness in the 1930s. In the second film, *Prairie Fire* (Liaoyuan 燎原, dirs. Gu Eryi 顧而已 and Zhang Junxiang 張駿祥, 1962), the glory of the originary myth of workers' solidarity at Anyuan is displaced by the volatility of contemporary turf wars in the political arena.

Big Road **(1934): The Crowd's Filmic Resurrection**

The emergence of the filmic crowd in Chinese cinema coincides with a concerted effort among some filmmakers and studios to produce more socially and ideologically engaged works in the early 1930s. Depicting the lives of the lower classes and arousing national patriotic sentiment as resistance against the Japanese invasion were key elements in the campaign for national salvation and the advancement of the cause of class struggle. Unlike similar efforts in literature and drama at the same time however, including the concurrent Movement for Literary Massification, which sought to address a particular

lack of popular appeal on the part of the literary word and modern stage,[29] mass-mediated and mass-consumed film seemed ideally suited to become the "sharpest ideological weapon of class struggle 電影是階級鬥爭中最犀利的思想武器."[30] The Left-Wing Cinema Movement was inaugurated within an institutional framework and supported by the Chinese Communist Party, but a lack of funds, in addition to the strictly enforced censorship guidelines of the ruling Nationalist Party, meant that in order to succeed, their films must perform well at the box office.[31] Cinema was at that time primarily a commercial enterprise more concerned with attracting crowds than mobilizing them. Laikwan Pang attributes the success of leftist-oriented films in the early 1930s to their ability to turn profits for the struggling Shanghai studio, noting their "success in ideological terms was necessarily conditioned to the films' popularity among the mass."[32] Picturing the crowd onscreen in this context is thus already marked with ambivalence; the revolutionary masses are a subject of films and object of filmic interpellation as much as they are paying customers to a spectacle, wanting to be entertained.

Also relevant here is the fact that, in stylistic terms, most of these films borrow more from the Hollywood melodramas that dominated the Shanghai film market at the time, rather than more theoretically collective forms of Soviet dialecticalism. Ironically,

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[29] On the massification of literature, see Chapter 2 of this dissertation. Also see Marston Anderson, *The Limits of Realism*, 69-70.

[30] Xia Yan 夏衍. "Zhuinian Qu Qiubai tongzhi 追念瞿秋白同志 (Recollecting Comrade Qu Qiubai)." *Yi Qiubai* 憶秋白 (Remembering Qiubai). Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1981. 315. The conversation between Xia Yan, the head of the League of Left Wing Dramatists (which included film among their activities) and Qu Qiubai, former CCP leader and head of the League of Left-Wing Writers, is also recounted in Leyda, Jay. *Dianying: An Account of Films and the Film Audience in China*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1972. 73-74.

[31] See Laikwan Pang, *Building a New China in Cinema,* 37-43.

[32] Ibid., 8.

Hollywood's 1930s Hays Code (notorious for requiring that married couples never be shown sharing a bed on-screen) clearly reflected an awareness of film's collectivizing impact on theater audiences in its specification that, "Psychologically, the larger the audience the lower the moral mass resistance to suggestion."[33] Film scholar Michael Tratner, in his book *Crowd Scenes*, shows how Hollywood's response to film's inherent political potential actually shares much of the crowd rhetoric with the collectivist cinemas of Soviet Russia and Nazi Germany, but "redirects" the passion that fuels mass politics into private romance. Rather than escaping the crowd through romance (as Freud would have it in *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*), the inherently unwholesome lustfulness of crowds, stimulated and conditioned by film's collective experience, can be funneled into more edifying, and socially benign forms of love.[34] In Chinese films of the 1930s, the competition between these notions of film as sensational melodrama or ideological weaponry produced a stylistic hybridity in the crowd image, a call to revolution marked with allure of spectacle.

Big Road was filmed in July of 1934 and released for the Spring Festival in early 1935. Director Sun Yu, one of the few Chinese directors of that time to have had formal training in the United States, had explored nationalist and revolutionary themes in his previous films for the Lianhua Film Company (*Lianhua yingye gongsi* 聯華影業公司), but to meet the demands of the plot of *Big Road*, he needed more than just that the leads to be stars, he also needed an ensemble cast of stars to ensure that the film's

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[33] The Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America. "The Motion Picture Production Code of 1930." *The Movies in Our Midst: Documents in the Cultural History of Film in America*. Ed. Gerald Mast. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982. 323.

[34] See Michael Tratner, *Crowd Scenes*, 1-11.

Fig. 3.1 The six friends on the road-building crew piece together a broken wine cup, one of the numerous images of collectivity in *Big Road*.

collectivizing message came across clearly.[35] The film follows a group of six male friends who embark on a road-building project that would serve as a crucial supply way for the Chinese army to use in their fight against the Japanese invasion. The motley group, which includes several possible identification points for a modern urban audience, such as an ambitious intellectual, a former ruffian, a brooding romantic, and so on, is led by one Brother Jin (played by Jin Yan 金焰), who has spent nearly his entire life as part of a road-building crew, and even witnesses the death of his own father in the midst of the strenuous labor. Brother Jin has the unique ability to rouse crowds into action whenever the situation arises, as well as to bring new members into the ever-expanding group, as

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[35] Sun Yu 孫瑜. *Yinhai fanzhou: Huiyi wo de yisheng* 銀海泛舟：回憶我的一生 (A Drifting Boat on Silver Seas: Remembering My Life). Shanghai: Shanghai wenyi chubanshe, 1987. 110-111.

when he defends a starving thief from physical harm from a mob of angry shopkeepers and convinces him to give up his life of crime with the promise of hard work, or when his gallant challenge to the abusive foreman magnetically draws in the two young girls Moli and Dingxiang, who work at a nearby restaurant. His talent at rallying the crowd, and channeling the crowd's violent instincts into a healthy desire for national service, are also manifested in the important plot points of mustering the assembly of road builders and convincing the fearful mob that wants to flee an impending attack from the Japanese army to stay and fight. The traitorous landlord, upon witnessing Brother Jin in action, asks of his lackey, "Why do so many people follow him? 為甚麼有那許多人跟著他起？" These crowd scenes typically alternate from eye-level, or even low angles that

Fig. 3.2 Brother Jin rallies the villagers to stay and resist the advance of the Japanese.

stress the heroism of Brother Jin (further highlighted by his righteously glowing and often shirtless physique), to high angle crane shots which make visible the crowd in the midst of formation. The portrayal of the crowd as this alluring, exhilarating force reminds us more of a carnival than a revolution: an elation in the spectacle of upturned hierarchies rather than ideological propagation. The carnivalesque egalitarianism in the revolutionary crowd that heightens the sense of filmic spectacle on display would become a common motif in leftist films of the 1930s, perhaps most memorably in the parade of misfits that opens Yuan Muzhi's 袁牧之 1937 classic *Street Angel* (Malu tianshi 馬路天使), or the uproarious mob of children that save the day in Cai Chusheng's 蔡楚生 segment for the 1937 omnibus project *Lianhua Symphony* (Lianhua jiaoxiangqu 聯華交響曲), "Five Brothers" (*Xiaowuyi* 小五義).

Rallying cries for the downtrodden and appeals to national and class camaraderie are the most obvious way that the collective is compelled in *Big Road*. Contemporary criticism of *Big Road* has primarily focused on the film's treatment of the characters' sexuality (mostly by reading one particular scene in which the two restaurant girls daydream about each of the six workers while sharing a cuddle), and whether the process through which sexual desire is left deferred constitutes "sublimation" to the political work of revolution.[36] Rather than follow the psychoanalytical reading that reiterates an antagonism between sex and revolution, I would agree again with Laikwan Pang, who argues of the film that "sexual urges are not avoided but indeed fulfilled through political

[36] Chris Berry's article, "The Sublimative Text: Sex and Revolution in *Big Road*" (*East-West Film Journal* 2.2 [June 1988]. 66-86.) in particular has provoked numerous critical responses. See Laikwan Pang, *Building a New China in Cinema*, 98-102; Shen, Vivian. *The Origins of Left-wing Cinema in China, 1932-37*. New York: Routledge, 2005. 126-133; and Zhang, Yingjin. *Screening China: Critical Interventions, Cinematic Reconfigurations, and the Transnational Imaginary in Contemporary Chinese Cinema*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Center for Chinese Studies, 2002. 120-125.

participation, although the libidinal is ultimately satisfied in a destructive way through death."[37] As intriguing as the suggestion of a kind of collective romance or sexuality in the film is, I want to focus on the final, under-discussed scene of death, which not only provides an apt counterpoint to the daydream sequence, but also provides a uniquely cinematic rendering of the phantasmagoric nature of the crowd imagination.

Following the overthrow of the evil landlord, the crew redoubles their efforts to finish building the road so that the Chinese forces can defend against Japanese aggression. Just as they achieve success, a Japanese plane (identified only as "the enemy" [*diren* 敵人] due to censorship) cuts down every member of the road crew as they work, save for the younger girl from the restaurant, Dingxiang (Chen Yanyan 陳燕燕). Disheartened by the massacre they have just witnessed, Dingxiang's father despairs that everyone has been killed. But Dingxiang refuses to accept this tragic fact and defiantly exclaims, "No! They are not dead! 不！他们没有死！" Onscreen we see the shimmering ghosts of the road workers rise from their corpses and happily get right back to work.[38] The film's final shot of a close-up of Dingxiang's face layered over soldiers and workers along the road the background seems to confirm that this phantasmal resurrection is but a subjective "vision," as Chris Berry claims, but also makes clear the

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[37] Laikwan Pang, *Building a New China in Cinema*, 101.

[38] The visual trick that resurrects the crowd from the dead is not Sun Yu's invention. Superimposition had been used from the earliest days of film as a special effect (Georges Méliès used it as early as 1898 in his short "The Four Troublesome Heads" [Un Homme de têtes]), but was perhaps most famously used in Abel Gance's 1919 masterpiece *J'Accuse* to create the ghostly effect of the march of dead soldiers of the First World War. In a bit of tragic irony, the actors Gance used in that scene were soldiers on a short leave, most of whom, days after filming, were killed at the front. See Brownlow, Kevin. *The Parade's Gone By ...* New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1969. 532-537.

Fig. 3.3 After a Japanese plane guns down the road crew, they are resurrected as a cinematic effect.

Fig. 3.4 The final shot of Big Road superimposes a close-up of Dingxiang over the road completed by her fallen friends.

message of internalizing their collective spirit.[39] The special effect that superimposes the semi-transparent ghosts of the workers over their corpses produces a palimpsest: the ghostly visualization of wholeness that the crowd compels carries its own double as a specter, and even conditions the anticipation of its dissolution, extinction, and disappearance. The crowd is caught up in the representational and filmic dynamic that engenders and sustains it, negatively pictured in absence through this very system of coming-into-being. Even (and especially) within the revolutionary crowd, we find a haunting recurrence of violence, sacrifice and martyrdom. In this way, every crowd is always already doubled and every mass bears the possibility of massacre.

Prairie Fire (1962): Disappearing the Crowd into Myth

The Communist triumph that culminated with the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949 meant for film a thorough reorganization through the nationalization and expansion of the film industry, as well as the assumption of the most prominent role in figuring a mass, national culture under the direction of the Party leadership. One of the primary tasks for filmmakers and the government in the 1950s and 1960s was increasing film viewership. While only five hundred or so movie theaters were in operation in 1949, mostly located in the major cities, the end of that year saw one hundred film projection teams (*dianying fangying dui* 電影放映隊) traveling to countryside villages, military bases, and industrial centers, bringing newsreels, Soviet

[39] See Chris Berry, "The Sublimative Text," 83. As Dingxiang makes her exclamation, her father's gaze turns toward the scene of the massacre in amazement, suggesting perhaps that she is not the only one to witness the workers' ghosts. What's more, the final shot used here repeats the technique used at the ending of *Wild Rose* (Ye meigui 野玫瑰), Sun Yu's 1932 film, in which a series of shots of the protagonists are superimposed over marching soldiers, is another example of the complex relation between the mass figures of the crowd image and the star image.

features, and recent domestic productions to these audiences.[40] By 1960, the number of projection teams and viewing audience would increase more than one hundred times, reaching every corner of Chinese.[41] Tina Mai Chen's important research into film's role after 1949 as an essential element in establishing Maoist modernity shows how the filmic practices articulated a sense of national belonging and played a pivotal role in the construction of "the people."[42] Beyond merely determining the content on display in films, CCP policies took the collective nature of film viewership as its basis for expanding the collective subject of the nation.

Following the collapse of diplomatic relations between the Soviet Union and the PRC in the late 1950s, Chinese filmmakers sought to create new works that departed from Soviet formulas, re-envisioning China's own revolutionary past as an integral, active part of the construction of the nation's socialist future. Xudong Zhang writes that the complex experience of Chinese socialism "is deeply embedded in the utopia and ideology of the collective effort to create not only history, but its narration, its narrativity, its culture."[43] Film's role in constructing an indigenous revolutionary tradition necessarily featured the image of the crowd, projected and re-imagined in the past as the

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[40] These figures come from Clark, Paul. *Chinese Cinema: Culture and Politics Since 1949*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987. 36.

[41] Paul Clark, citing the People's Daily, notes 10,000 projection units in 1958 and 14,565 in 1960. See Paul Clark, *Chinese Cinema*, 61-62. Tina Mai Chen cites a figure of 12,579 units in 1958. See Chen, Tina Mai. "Textual Communities and Localized Practices of Film in Maoist China." *Film, History and Cultural Citizenship: Sites of Production*. Eds. Tina Mai Chen and David S. Churchill. New York, Routledge, 2007. 66.

[42] See especially Chen, Tina Mai. "Propagating the Propaganda Film: The Meaning of Film in Chinese Communist Writings, 1949-1965." *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture* 15.2 (Fall 2003). 154-193.

[43] Zhang, Xudong. "The Power of Rewriting: Postrevolutionary Discourse on Chinese Socialist Realism." *Socialist Realism Without Shores*. Eds. Thomas Lahusen and Evgeny Dobrenko. Durham: Duke University Press, 1997. 282.

predecessors of the contemporary masses. Lineage is itself another kind of crowd image, connecting present movements to a legitimating history while also using their antecedents' absence to arouse motivation and compel commitment.

The 1962 film *Prairie Fire*, whose title alludes to one of the most well-known revolutionary crowd metaphors in Mao's slogan, "a single spark can start a prairie fire 星星之火，可以燎原," explicitly establishes this kind of imagination of the crowd lineage at the outset. Beginning in 1905 with a depiction of a failed attempt by workers to negotiate for unpaid wages at an unnamed Jiangxi mine, the film concludes with the triumph of a successfully organized strike. The Qing officials who operate the mine in the beginning murder the worker's representative and send troops to massacre the unarmed miners waiting outside. The climactic scene, set in 1922, eerily recalls, right down to the shot arrangement, that earlier sequence that ended in disaster. Through the educational and ideological training brought by the Communist Party, however, they are able to secure a major victory. What's more, the film ends with a chant that projects their achievements into a timeless future, "Long live the workers! 工人万歲！" The temporal arrangement that frames the film, therefore, assumes the nature of the crowd imagination in CCP ideology: from suffering, sacrifice, and death are forged the immortal bonds of class consciousness, and the promise of utopia.

This sort of ideological reading of the crowd image in the film is limited, however, and a different sort of haunting crowd is made evident by looking at the historical context of the film's production and release, as well as the legacy of the subject of the film itself. Based on the victorious workers' strike at Anyuan four decades before

Fig. 3.5 The fearful and chaotic crowd in the opening sequence of *Prairie Fire* contrasts sharply with the discipline and unity it displays at the film's climax.

(and filmed on location), the release of *Prairie Fire* in late 1962 coincided with efforts within the CCP to mythologize the Great Strike of Anyuan in revolutionary history, as well as fierce intra-Party leadership struggles over control of the revolutionary narrative. Elizabeth Perry notes the ways in which venerating Anyuan in the historical memory in the 1950s and 1960s had more to do with "the current objective of regime consolidation" following the nation's founding than with establishing a factual record of what happened there.[44] The teacher Lei Huanjue (Wang Shangxin 王尚信), the protagonist of *Prairie Fire* who travels to the mine to set up a night school for workers, is explicitly modeled after Liu Shaoqi 劉少奇, who took the reigns of power from Mao in the wake of his

[44] See especially Chapters 5 and 6 in Perry, Elizabeth. *Anyuan: Mining China's Revolutionary Tradition.* Berkeley: University of California Press, forthcoming.

disastrous campaign of the Great Leap Forward (*Da yuejin* 大躍進). Mao, who had instructed Liu to go to Anyuan in 1921, and Li Lisan 李立三, who was the primary organizer of the workers there and who implemented Mao's instructions to establish the school, are left unmentioned in the film.[45] The film's attribution of heroic leadership solely to one person evidences a politically motivated construction of a cult of personality around Liu Shaoqi in the early 1960s, but also foregrounds the problem of "how to depict the ideologically correct relationship between the leader and the masses."[46] This visually reciprocal, mutually constitutive relationship hinted at in *Prairie Fire*, would become of utmost importance, and impossibly aggrandized, just a few years later in the Cultural Revolution in the deified image of Mao, often at the expense of the then-disgraced Liu.

At the film's climactic moment during Lei's negotiation with the mine's iron-fisted management, Lei reveals the throngs of striking workers to the owners at precisely the right moment in a arresting display of the crowd's power as spectacular image. Overwhelmed by the number of workers that descend from all angles, the cowed mine owners beg Lei to calm them and promise to negotiate. Amassed outside the balcony of the owner's cushy offices, the workers sing in unison, "We are not beasts of burden, we are human! 我們不是牛馬，我們是人！" as the craned camera pans dramatically across the assembled masses. The rallying cry for the dignity of workers stresses that the

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[45] Perry, citing a handbill from the Pingxiang City Library, notes that the script for the film originally included more than twenty references to Mao, but all were removed in the subsequent rewrites that were overseen by the Vice-Minister of Culture, Xia Yan (who had previously led the League of Left Wing Dramatists in the 1930s). See Elizabeth Perry, *Anyuan*, forthcoming.

[46] Quoted from a discussion of the famous (and enormous) Hou Yimin 候一民 painting *Liu Shaoqi and the Anyuan Miners* (Liu Shaoqi tongzhi he Anyuan kuanggong 劉少奇同志和安源礦工), completed in 1961 and displayed prominently in the Museum of the Chinese Revolution (*Zhongguo geming lishi bowuguan* 中國革命曆史博物館) before it was destroyed by Red Guards in 1968. See Laing, Ellen Johnston. *The Winking Owl: Art in the People's Republic of China*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988. 38-39.

process of becoming human necessarily means working collectively in solidarity. Lei is shown in this scene not merely as the clever representative of the workers with a flair for the dramatic, but their director in a filmic sense. On his signal, they are made manifest and, unveiled to the mine owners from the panoramic perch of the balcony, shout and sing the slogans he has provided them.

The historical lesson in the film, predictably, upholds the heroic leader's ability to bring the crowd into being. Equipped with the Communist gospel, Lei Huanjue (that is, Liu Shaoqi) is presented as a savior of the masses who arms them with the correct ideological training that lets them overcome their previous annihilation by physically manifesting their spectacular visual presence. What may seem at first to be a triumphant

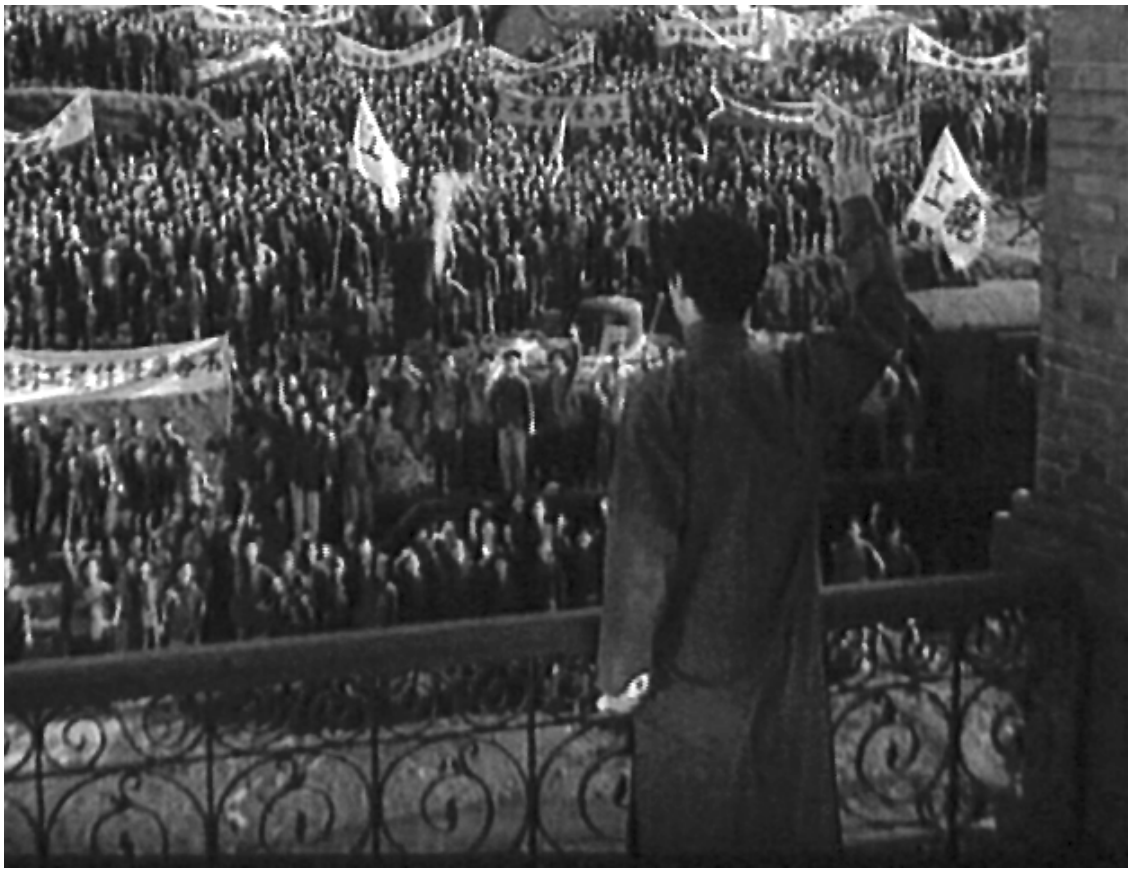

Fig. 3.6 The Communist teacher Lei Huanjue addresses the striking workers during the negotiations with the mine's management, newly cowed by the size and strength of the crowd.

vanquishing of the crowd's ghostly double that has haunted it, however, is complicated by the film's own history of erasure. Not long after the film's release, Li Lisan, who, having previously faced repeated criticism and even exile, may have sensed which way the political winds were blowing and penned a review of the film, "After Seeing Prairie Fire" (*Kanle* Liaoyuan *yihou* 看了《燎原》以後) that criticizes the lack of emphasis on Mao Zedong Thought in the film.[47] But even this bit of modest genuflection was not enough to save the oft-criticized Li, who was included in Jiang Qing's 江青 denunciation of the film as a "poisonous weed" (*daducao* 大毒草).[48] Chairman Mao's exclusive appropriation of the legacy of Anyuan was already, less than three years later in 1965, immortalized in another myth of origins, the epic *The East Is Red* (Dongfang hong 東方紅, dir. Wang Ping 王苹, 1965). The short-lived personality cult of Liu Shaoqi that *Prairie Fire* was a part of would lead to his downfall, as he became one of the most frequent targets of the Cultural Revolution's Red Guards (*Hong weibing* 紅衛兵), even after his death under house arrest in 1969.[49] In May of 1967, the magazine *Red Flag* (Hongqi 紅旗) published a scathing critique of the film, accusing it of "falsifying history" (*cuangai lishi* 篡改歷史), and linking it to Liu's own unpardonable position as

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[47] Li's essay appeared in the People's Daily (*Renmin ribao* 人民日報)in the summer of 1963, and is reprinted in Liang Zhu 梁柱. *Shengsi juelian: Li Sha yu Li Lisan de kuaguo hunyin* 生死絕戀：李莎與李立三的跨國婚姻 (Undying Devotion: The Transnational Marriage of Li Sha and Li Lisan). Beijing: Zhonggongdangshi chubanshe, 2008. 191-196.

[48] Under severe criticism in 1967, Li wrote to Jiang Qing directly with a self-criticism for being incomplete in his essay, even admitting the "serious error" (*yanzhong de cuowu* 嚴重的錯誤) for not detailing the "anti-Party, anti-socialist, anti-Mao Zedong Thought 反黨、反社會主義、反毛澤在思想" crimes of Liu Shaoqi. He died by suicide two weeks later. His letter is reprinted in Liang Zhu, *Shengsi juelian*, 188-191.

[49] For a detailed account of Liu's persecution and posthumous rehabilitation, see Dittmer, Lowell. "Liu Shaoqi's Rehabilitation and Contemporary Chinese Politics." *Journal of Asian Studies* 40.3 (May 1981). 455-479.

Fig. 3.7 The striking workers display their might outside the mine's administrative offices.

Fig. 3.8 The workers sing "We Are Not Beasts of Burden, We Are Human," the song based on Li Lisan's famous declaration during the Anyuan strike.

the "Khrushchev of China."[50]

Underlying the political machinations and ferocious contestations over the claim to the revolutionary tradition of Anyuan, however, is the disappearance of the 14,000 or so workers that participated in the Great Strike. Perry quotes a recent interview of an Anyuan miner, who comments on the contemporary worsening working conditions of the mines: "These days our Anyuan workers' slogan goes like this, 'in the past we were beasts of burden, and now we are still not human.'"[51] The fleeting wholeness of emancipated humanity spectacularly projected in *Prairie Fire*, has continued, it seems, along a trajectory of disappearance that continues to haunt the present day. The repeated and contradictory efforts to glorify individual leadership of the strike are, seen retrospectively, foreshadowed in the film's ending. As the miners cheer, "Long live the workers!" one of them wonders, "Isn't the call for long life only for the emperor? 只有皇帝才叫萬歲。"

Ten Years of Crowds: The Cultural Revolution and Mao

Throughout the Mao era, images of the masses proliferated alongside the institutionalization of techniques, rituals, and grammars of collectivization, combining an aesthetic imaginary of mass politics with a nationwide mobilization of crowds mandated with ultimate revolutionary authority. The ideological notion of a "mass line" (*qunzhong luxian* 群眾路線) that promoted class struggle both as a way of clearly demarcating the

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[50] See Huang Xizhang 黃錫章. "Fandong dianying *Liaoyuan* yu Zhongguo de Xialuxiaofu 反動電影《燎原》與中國的赫魯曉夫" (Oppose the Movie *Prairie Fire* and China's Khrushchev). *Hongqi* 紅旗 (Red Flag) 1967.7. 33-44.

[51] Quote from Yu Jianrong's interview in Perry, Elizabeth. "Reclaiming the Chinese Revolution." *Journal of Asian Studies* 67.4 (November 2008). 1147-1164. 1161.

ideologically pure from the reactionary enemy as well as establishing solidarity between the CCP and the masses, had by the launching of the Cultural Revolution become established as ritual in "struggle sessions" (*pidou dahui* 批鬥大會) that exploited, as Elizabeth Perry explains, "just how volatile and fluid individual emotions can become in the context of group politics."[52] In the Cultural Revolution, depictions of the crowd in the process of coming into being gave way to those of spectacular immanence – an unambiguous and sublime realization of ideology in the form of revolutionary mass. With nominal control over all cultural production, the masses became a prominent feature of both daily life and in visual propaganda. The "dreamworld" of revolutionary history, to borrow Susan Buck-Morss' term (via Benjamin), was brought into the phenomenal everyday in the form of propaganda posters, populated and propagated by crowds.[53]

Fig. 3.9 An early propaganda poster of new China, *We Advance Under the Banner of Mao Zedong* (Zai Mao Zedong qizhixia qianjin 在毛澤東旗幟下前進; Zhang Ding 張仃, 1949) (*Mao Zedong xiang xuanchuanhua zhenxi tuji* 毛澤東像宣傳畫珍稀圖集 [Collection of Rare Propaganda Images of Mao Zedong]. Comp. Chang Chen 程宸. Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 2010. 43.)

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[52] Perry, Elizabeth J. "Moving the Masses: Emotion Work in the Chinese Revolution." *Mobilization: An International Journal* 7.2 (2002). 122.

[53] In Buck-Morss' analysis of the culture of Stalinist Russia, the imaginary of culture is invariably "double-edged:" the dreamworld of of happiness promised to the masses and the nightmare awaiting those who were banished from it, that became the effective instrument of mass control." Similar observations of the crowd, and mob violence, can certainly be made with respect to the Cultural Revolution in China. See Buck-Morss, Susan. *Dreamworlds and Catastrophe: The Passing of Mass Utopia in East and West*. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2000. 188.

The bold visual language of the propaganda posters of the Cultural Revolution period nearly always highlights the unity of the crowd through stylized trademarks such as the unidirectional gaze, uniform gestures, and, perhaps most significant, an open-ended capacity to grow beyond the frame of the picture. The extension of the crowd image and its powerful pull into nearly all facets of social and visual life by means of technologies of mass reproduction during the Cultural Revolution is surpassed in imagistic magnitude and sublimity only by the figure of Mao himself.

Scholarship on modern Chinese art, in both China and the west, has tended until recently to avoid much critical discussion of propaganda posters as art objects, even as the posters' exhibitionary value continues to increase, as evidenced by the regular publication of collections and catalogs of reproductions. Ban Wang succinctly describes the contradictory position scholars find themselves in when they approach the aesthetic dimension of the Cultural Revolution: "On the one hand, there was the desert barren of aesthetic and sensuous pleasure; on the other hand, there was too much enjoyment derived from the aesthetically engaged activities."[54] Given this combination of historical and political circumstances that both produced too little art and, it seems, too much, the reasons for the lack of scrutiny of propaganda posters are thus numerous and varied.[55]

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[54] Ban Wang, *The Sublime Figure of History*, 197.

[55] Recent art historical scholarship on modern Chinese art that includes discussions of propaganda posters includes the pioneering volume by Wang Mingxian 王明賢 and Yan Shanchun 嚴善錞. (*Xin Zhongguo meishu tushi* 新中國美術圖史1976-1976 [A Pictorial History of Art in New China, 1966-1976]. Beijing: Zhongguo qingnian chubanshe, 2000.) and the recently translated comprehensive survey on modern art in China by Lü Peng (*A History of Art in 20th-Century China*. New York: Charta, 2010.). Stefan Landsberger's numerous books, publications, and online collection are also an invaluable resource. See also *Art and China's Revolution*. Eds. Melissa Chiu and Zheng Shengtian. New York: Asia Society and Yale University Press, 2008. Various trends in contemporary art have also spurred interest in the lasting influence of Cultural Revolution-era posters and propaganda art. See for example, *Burden or Legacy? From the Chinese Cultural Revolution to Contemporary Art*. Ed. Jiang Jiehong. Hong Kong: Hong University Press, 2007.

Probably first among these is the fact that the Cultural Revolution sought to upend the very notions of art and artist, elevating the ideologically pure (i.e. amateur or untrained) above the established and traditional schools. Explicitly tasking the revolution with the sweeping away the "four olds" (*si jiu* 四舊) of customs, culture, habits, and ideas, the toll on art and artists was devastating. Michael Sullivan devotes his chapter on the Cultural Revolution in his comprehensive study of twentieth-century Chinese art to describing the horrors faced by artists in the face of the Red Guards' campaign of terror, lamenting the artistic treasures that were lost to political fervor more than examining what was actually produced during these years.[56] In the wake of such rampant, senseless destruction and tragic loss, whatever value we may find in political posters cannot compare to the resounding silence to which much art was reduced.

A second reason poster art has eluded much critical attention lies in the unequivocally political messaging that is the posters' primary function. Artistic and aesthetic concerns played a secondary role to the expression of revolutionary slogans and visualization of revolutionary enthusiasm. While most histories of art published in Mainland China extol the lasting value of the socialist realist oil paintings of Chairman Mao (such as *Chairman Mao Goes to Anyuan* [Mao zhuxi qu Anyuan 毛主席去安源], which was reproduced on a massive scale in all sorts of propaganda objects) or certain *guohua* works that were able to pass muster by virtue of their inclusion of revolutionary imagery, political posters that fall outside the conventional categories of artistic value such as composition and originality and are generally ignored. An additional formal

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[56] Sullivan, Michael. *Art and Artists of Twentieth-Century China*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996. 151-155.

hurdle for posters to merit scholarly attention is the written language that occurs with the image, both as a slogan along the bottom of the poster, and often within the image itself. Craig Clunas, in an article that describes the problems that posters pose for the conventional art historical approach, writes that such "ubiquity of the written word" in posters from the Cultural Revolution "serves to overdetermine interpretation by anchoring the image very firmly in a world of verbal formulae to which the audience was exposed on a daily basis."[57] Once again, the image is placed in a secondary position to that of the obvious political message (a point made even more clear by the fact that many images were recycled and attached to different slogans or campaigns).

One final feature of posters I want to mention here is their essential disposability. Quickly produced and cheaply printed in vast numbers by anonymous artists or collective work-teams, permanence was not a consideration. For all the political ritual and reverent iconography these posters embody, their medium displaces nearly all traces of the "aura" of authenticity in favor of the "auratic effects" of mass manipulation.[58] Another term for *xuanchuanhua* was *zhaotiehua* 招貼畫, literally a "placard picture" designed for the purposes of attracting attention by being attached to something else with glue or pins. Just as the "permanent revolution" of these years required ever-changing targets and aims of political campaigns and movements, the posters that accompanied these often

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[57] Clunas, Craig. "Souvenirs of Beijing: Authority and Subjectivity in Art Historical Memory." *Picturing Power in the People's Republic of China: Posters of the Cultural Revolution*. Eds. Harriet Evans and Stephanie Donald. Boulder: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1999. 57.

[58] On the aura, see Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." Despite Benjamin's explicit link between the "decay of the aura" and technological reproduction, we should not mistake Benjamin's criticism for negativity. Miriam Bratu Hansen writes of Benjamin's suggestion that "aura as a medium of perception — or 'perceptibility' — becomes visible only on the basis of technological reproduction." See Hansen, Miriam Bratu. "Benjamin's Aura." *Critical Inquiry* 34 (Winter 2008). 342-343.

bewildering shifts in the political winds were constantly renewed.

My own approach to teasing out some of the implications of the figure of the crowd in the propaganda posters of the Cultural Revolution depends less on imputing meaning to the image, but the forms that the image takes, both in the sense of how the crowd is depicted in a variety of techniques and styles, and as an element of the medium itself: heavily stylized, politically overdetermined, and most significantly, mass-produced and reproduced. While taking up Clunas' call for a more serious assessment of the visual culture of the Cultural Revolution, "where looking itself is seen as a social activity," is beyond the scope of this brief outline, his advice to incorporate "an approach that stops fetishizing the moment of production of the posters" is essential to my critical framework.[59] The technology and methods of poster production mirror the crowd along several points. First, many, if not most, of the posters created in the Cultural Revolution were produced collectively. Many are attributed to work-teams, military units, or peasant associations. Even in cases in which

Fig. 3.10 A poster produced following the October 30, 1968 publication of the "Report on the Enlarged 12th Plenary Session of the Eighth Central Committee of the CCP," which targeted Liu Shaoqi for criticism.

[59] Craig Clunas, "Souvenirs of Beijing," 60.

an individual is given credit, personal vision is downplayed in favor of revolutionary inspiration from Party superiors and, more generally, Mao Zedong Thought. The second point of intersection can be located in the subject of the poster. With the exception of Mao, no other icon of revolutionary China appears more in propaganda than that of the crowd. Expressions of collectivity and multiplicity abound in these posters (different types of which are examined below), which may not be surprising considering the ideology being propagated through them. But what remains remarkable about the presence of the crowd in these posters is not its mere depiction, but the degree of correspondence achieved between the form, content, and medium. The third point is in the technology of mass reproduction, which, I am arguing, not only aids the dissemination of Maoist ideology, but also replicates it to a degree that the image and imagination of the crowd may itself be seen as a visualizing medium.

Like the cinema, the poster represents a quintessentially modern medium, the rise of which runs parallel to both the emergence of ideologies of mass politics and the increase of aggregations of human crowds in urban spaces. In Europe, political posters that include both text and images can be traced back as early as the the French Revolution,[60] but it was the technological developments in the second half of the nineteenth century, such as efficient and inexpensive paper production, faster drying inks, and greater use of color, that allowed for the widespread use of the poster medium. By the turn of the twentieth century, the growth of the crowd into a dominant social force had fundamentally transformed the means of communication between the state and its

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[60] See, for example, a discussion of the graphic commemoration of the murdered hero of the French Revolution, Jean-Paul Marat in Crowley, David. "The Propaganda Poster." *The Power of the Poster*. Ed. Margaret Timmers. London: V&A Publications, 1998. 102-103.

people. During the mass propaganda campaigns of World War I, posters performed a vital role in "the formation of a new verbal-visual language of mass persuasion: a language that had to communicate efficiently in already semiotically oversaturated urban environments as well as compete with both rival media and commercial counterparts."[61] Discussing posters' "visually aggressive" nature, Susan Sontag pushes this idea further, asserting "posters are aggressive because they appear in the context of *other* posters. ... [T]he form of the poster depends on the fact that many posters exist — competing with (and sometimes reinforcing) each other. Thus posters also presuppose the modern concept of public space — as a theater of persuasion."[62] The poster became at once a means of expression of mass opinion (both in terms of resistance against hegemony or in support of it) and a method of mass coercion, or, in slightly different terms, crowd control.

In China, at least two factors contribute to significant divergence from the European history of poster production. The long traditions of woodblock printing (which dates to the Tang dynasty) and the *nianhua* 年畫, or New Year's pictures, that utilized this printing method (which have been popular in China since at least the Song dynasty) provide a particular cultural context that plays a considerable role in the popular reception of propaganda art during the twentieth century. James Flatch, noting that it was during the Qing dynasty that *nianhua* began to be used as vehicles for the promotion of social order among the rural (and mostly illiterate) population, remarks on the

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[61] Schnapp, Jeffrey T. "Epilogue." *Picture This: World War I Posters and Visual Culture*. Ed. Pearl James. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009. 371.

[62] Sontag, Susan. "Posters: Advertisement, Art, Political Artifact, Commodity." *The Art of Revolution*. By Dugald Stermer. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1970.

effectiveness of images rather than textual instruction that, "Orthodox moral guidelines did ultimately have an effect on rural society by encouraging ritual praxis, but the real content of the moral world was provided not by the original text but by the narrative reinvention of the moral message through popular texts, or popular images, including *nianhua*."[63] The potential for conveying political messages through the simple designs and bright colors of *nianhua* was seized by Communists fighters headquartered in Yan'an, especially after Mao's exhortations to in the 1942 "Talks at the Yan'an Conference on Literature and Art" to "popularize" (*puji* 普及) literature and art by appropriating the "raw materials" (*yuanliao* 原料) from the people in order to "shape them into ideological forms of literature and art that serve the masses of people. 形成觀念形態上的為人民大眾的文學藝術。"[64] Immediately following the founding of the PRC in 1949, the Ministry of Culture issued a directive on

Fig. 3.11 A *nianhua* calander made in 1948 featuring Mao Zedong. (Zhang Shaoqian. "The Supremacy of Modern Time: Reshaping the Image of China in Early Twentieth-Century Calander Posters." *Modern Art Asia* 6 (March 2011). http://modernartasia.com/layout.php?issue=6. Accessed 27 August 2012.

[63] Flatch, James. *The Cult of Happiness:* Nianhua*, Art, and History in Rural North China*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2004. 59.

[64] Mao Zedong 毛澤東. "Zai Yan'an wenyi zuotanhui shang de jianghua 在延安文艺座谈会上的讲话**"** (Talks at the Yan'an Conference on Literature and Art). *Mao Zedong xuanji* 毛澤東選集 (Selected Works of Mao Zedong). Vol. 3. Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1961. 865. On 871, Mao also notes on in his directive the deficiencies of the "sign and slogan style" (*biaoyu kouhao shi* 標語口號式) that has "the correct political viewpoint but lacks artistic strength. 正確的政治觀點而沒有藝術力量。"

the significance of *nianhua*:

> With Chinese Lunar New Year fast approaching — the first since the founding of the PRC — local cultural and educational organizations should look upon the development and spread of *nianhua* as one of their most essential tasks during this New Year's propaganda activities. [...] To launch a widespread *nianhua* movement, regional cultural and educational agencies, and art organizations, should mobilize artists to produce new prints, letting them know that this is an important artistic undertaking with wide impact. [We] oppose those artists who tend to belittle the task of popularization. Moreover, we should work with those who engage in the old *nianhua* trade and cooperate with folk artists, providing them with new sketches, reforming them, and, through them, reaching a wide audience.[65]

The suggestion of *nianhua* as a means of popularizing the rule and policies of the Communist Party entails both capitalizing on its festive associations and, at the same time, reforming its ritual use to convey political messages. That is, instead of being confined to their traditional use inside private homes, the Communist reformulation of *nianhua* implies a public audience, or, more specifically, establishing the very notion of the public audience, the viewing masses, in the countryside and rural villages.

An additional predecessor to the visual propaganda that developed after 1949, particularly in terms of the depiction of the crowd, is the Modern Woodcut Movement that flourished in the 1930s and 1940s. While the woodcut medium remained one of the primary forms of visual propaganda through 1960s, it is important to note that the early modern woodcut art of the 1930s, instigated by none other than Lu Xun, differs significantly in theme and style from the later works, especially those produced after the establishment of the PRC. This shift can be accounted for in part through attention to the visualization of crowds in these woodcuts. The prominent woodcut artist and critic Wang Qi 王琦 wrote in 1953 that in the 1930s artists who portrayed crowds of suffering refugees or massacred protesters were "not yet closely linked with the great revolutionary

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[65] Issued on November 27, 1949, and quoted in Hung, Chang-Tai. "Repainting China: New Year Prints (Nianhua) and Peasant Resistance in the Early Years of the People's Republic." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 42:4 (October 2000). 770.

movement of the masses or conscious of its mighty strength."[66] Following Mao's prescriptions in the "Talks at the Yan'an Conference," not only was the content refashioned, but the style was modified as well; "In form they laid too much emphasis on the use of dark shadow ... There was little optimism in the woodcuts of this period and little of the national tradition."[67]

Modern woodcuts came into use as illustrations and cover designs for works of May Fourth and progressive fiction (in particular in the literature of massification, discussed in Chapter 2) in magazines and books beginning in the late 1920s. Lu Xun propagated the utilization of woodcut prints as an effective and stark way to represent suffering and other of life's darker aspects. Like a visual counterpart to the graphic realism of the "literature of blood and tears," woodcuts, he thought, could serve as a social weapon; Shirley Hsiao-ling Sun notes that Lu Xun "saw the act of carving and engraving on wood similar to … [the way] he himself wielded his writing brush cuttingly, as if it were a scalpel."[68] Lu Xun himself wrote that "the creative woodcut artist neither imitates or reproduces, but puts his knife to the wood to directly make the engraving. 所謂創作底木刻者，不模仿，不復刻，作者捏刀向木，直刻下去。"[69] Besides his founding of the Morning Flower Society (*Chaohua she* 朝花社) in 1928, established with the express purpose of introducing European literature and importing foreign woodcuts

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[66] Quoted in Wachs, Iris. "Themes, Style, and the Historical Background." *Half a Century of Chinese Woodblock Prints: From the Communist Revolution to the Open-Door Policy and Beyond, 1945-1998*. Eds. Iris Wachs and Chang Tsong-zung. Israel: The Museum of Art Ein Harod, 1999. 31.

[67] Ibid.

[68] Sun, Shirley Hsiao-ling. *Lu Hsün and the Chinese Woodcut Movement: 1929-1936*. Stanford University Ph.D. dissertation (Fine Arts), 1974. 50.

[69] Lu Xun, "*Jindai muke xuanji* xiaoyin 《近代木刻選集》(1) 小引" (Brief Introduction to *Selection of Modern Woodcuts* [1]), *Lu Xun quanji*, Vol. 7, 320.

through the series *Morning Flowers in the Garden of Art* (Yiyuan chaohua 藝苑朝花, edited by Rou Shi 柔石), Lu Xun organized exhibitions and workshops, funded journals, and served as unofficial adviser (as well as constant critic) to the progressive movement. Through his introduction of modern European and Japanese woodcut art, such as Aubrey Beardsley, Fukiya Koji 蕗谷虹兒, Vladimir Favorsky, Frans Masereel, and, perhaps most importantly, Käthe Kollwitz, Lu Xun's impact on the burgeoning school was tremendous, both in terms of artistic style and the political import. Lu Xun stressed the principle of "beauty of strength" (*li zhi mei* 力之美) and emphasized the works' realist qualities.[70] These examples, he hoped, would help Chinese artists establish the foundations for a Chinese artistic realism to illustrate, through images of suffering or uprising, the necessity for a modern proletariat consciousness and subjectivity.

Fig. 3.12 Bai Langsha's 白浪砂 1936 woodcut *The December Ninth Movement to Save the Nation* (Shier jiu jiuwang yundong 一二·九救亡運動) depicts student proteseters demonstarting against the Nationalist governments policy of inaction against Japanese encroachment into Chinese territory (*Lu Xun cang Zhongguo xiandai muke quanji* 魯迅藏中國現代木刻全集 (Lu Xun's Complete Collection of Modern Chinese Woodcuts). Vol. 1. Nanjing: Jiangsu guji chubanshe, 1991. 282.).

Other considerations also motivated Lu Xun's enthusiasm for the woodcut. First, engraving woodcuts did not require sophisticated technology or many supplies. The

[70] In February of 1930 Lu Xun addressed the left-wing Epoch Art Society (Shidai meishu she 時代美術社), in which he compared Millet's famous nineteenth-century realist painting The Gleaners (*Des glaneuses*) with a Shanghai advertising poster that featured a modern beauty. Rather than arguing that art is a tool of class struggle, however, Lu Xun upheld the French painting as an example of a different conception of beauty. See Lü Peng, *A History of Art in 20th-Century China*, 338-339.

limitations of material feasibility became a primary feature of the ideology they were propagating. "Because of the needs of the revolution, including propaganda, education, decoration, and popularization," Lu Xun writes in the preface of final volume of *Morning Flowers* series, "this age saw the remarkable development of woodblock prints — woodcuts, lithographs, illustrations, decorative paintings, and copper etching. 又因為革命所需要，有宣傳，教化，裝飾和普及，所以在這時代，版畫 —— 木刻，石版，插畫，裝畫，蝕銅版 —— 就非常發達了。"[71] The woodblock printing medium, in particular, suits the revolutionary ethos: "In revolutionary times, the woodblock print is most widespread, because even in extremely pressing circumstances it can be produced quickly. 當革命時，版畫之用最廣，雖极匆忙，頃刻能辦。"[72] The stark lines of black and white of the expressionistic woodcuts gave them not just a realistic and vigorous appeal, but also lent themselves easily to mass reproducibility and distribution; they are able to be faithfully and cheaply reprinted in magazines and books without losing any of their ideological import.

Writer Ye Shengtao, in his preface to the 1946 collection *Woodcuts of Wartime China, 1937-1945* (Kangri banian muke xuanji 抗日八年木刻選集), points out that in woodcut art, "One sees the hatred of our enemy, the fellow-feeling (not pity) toward the

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[71] Lu Xun, "*Xin E hua xuan* xiaoyin 《新俄畫選》小引" (Brief Introduction to *New Russian Paintings*), *Lu Xun quanji*, Vol. 7, 344-345. It should also be noted that Lu Xun was a connoisseur of ancient woodcuts and woodblock prints, as well, and recognized the existing affinity for this art among the masses as an important reason for his advocacy of modern woodcuts. However, he was careful to circumscribe the influence of tradition and defined the modern movement as a wholly separate practice defined in terms of its European practitioners. "The Chinese woodcut has a very honorable history from the Tang to the Ming dynasty," he writes. "However, the present day new woodcut has nothing to do with this history. The new woodcut is influenced by the European creative woodcut. 中國木刻圖畫，從唐到明，曾經有過很體面的歷史。但現在的新的木刻，卻和這歷史不相干。新的木刻，是受了歐洲的創作木刻的影響的。" See Lu Xun, "*Muke jicheng* xiaoyin 《木刻纪程》小引" (Brief Introduction to *Woodcut Account*), *Lu Xun quanji*, Vol. 6, 47.

[72] Lu Xun, "*Xin E hua xuan* xiaoyin," 345.

victimized among our people, the experiences of life of the general public and the expectations of the advent of a free China all depicted to the fullest extent. 對於敵人的憎恨，對於受苦難者的同感（不是同情），對於大眾生活的體驗，對於自由中國的期望，可以説表露無遺了."[73] The empathetic bond between the artist and the suffering masses that Ye approves of, "fellow-feeling" (*tonggan* 同感), is stipulated as something shared between the artist and the subject of art, and emphatically not dependent of the hierarchical condescension implied in the term "pity" (*tongqing* 同情). This fine distinction Ye makes in his preface reflects a tension penetrating much of the woodcut art in that volume and otherwise. In the name of realism, Lu Xun notoriously disliked portraits of the lower classes that endowed them with muscular strength rather than the more accurate visual terms of malnourishment, weakness, and oppression. In these woodcuts' varied and numerous depictions of crowds, we can make out some of the issues of technique that mark the differences between suffering crowd as the victim of historical forces and the anticipation of a united mass seizing upon the strength of their unity and

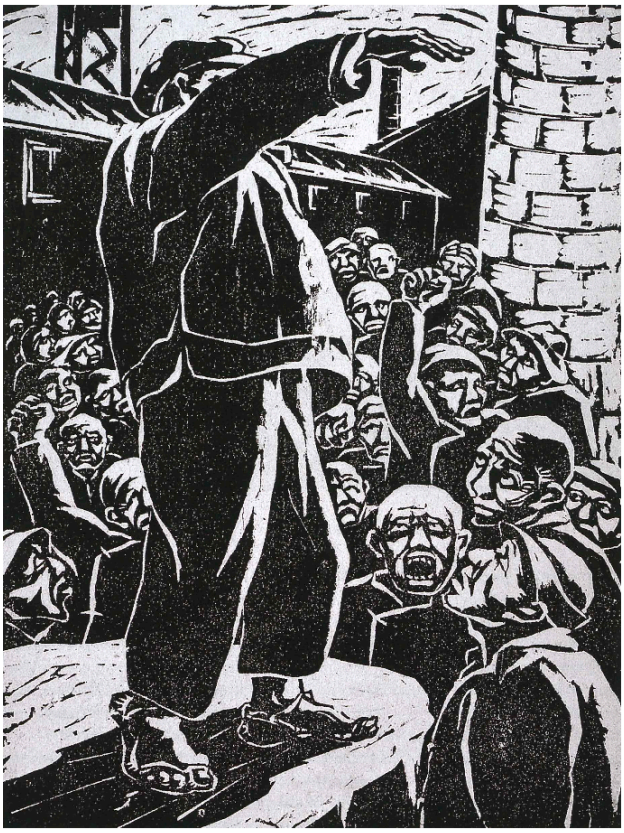

Fig. 3.13 Zheng Yefu 鄭野夫, *Rallying Call* (Haozhao 号召, 1933) (Lü Peng, *A History of Art in 20th-Century China*, 338.).

[73] *Kangri banian muke xuanji* 抗日八年木刻選集 (Woodcuts of Wartime China, 1937-1945. Shanghai: Kaiming shudian yinhang, 1946. vi. English translation on page xviii of the same volume.

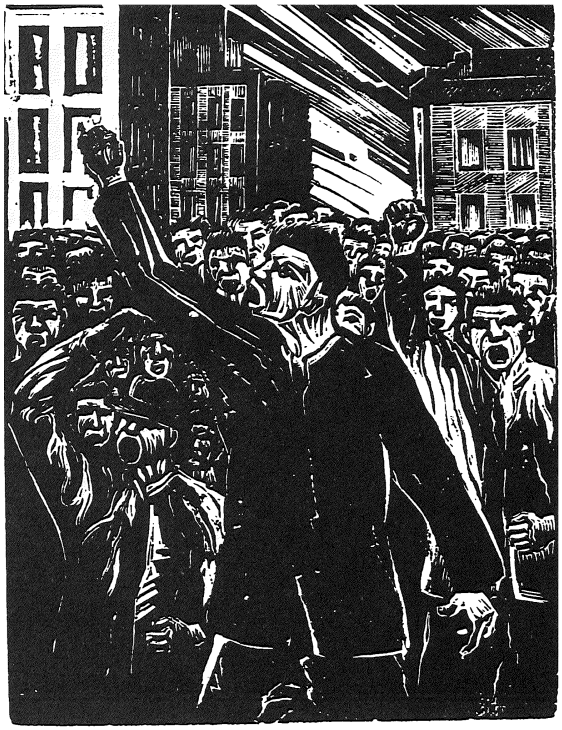

Fig. 3.14 Luo Qingzhen 羅清楨, *The Great Masses Rise Up* (Dazhong qilai 大眾起來, 1936) (*Lu Xun cang Zhongguo xiandai muke quanji*, Vol. 4, 1372.).

numbers.

The new woodcuts Lu Xun championed until his death were valued for their evocative potential. The sufferings and toils of the lower classes, the horror of life during war, oppression, and struggle were subjects that found an expressive visual language in the woodcut medium. Its bold lines, high contrast, stylized figuration, and stark lines of movement suggest an unprocessed and vigorous perspective on the devastating realities of everyday life in the 1930s. What's more, the woodcut's form imagined the crowd in a highly distinctive ways unprecedented in the Chinese tradition. Explicit about capturing the raw forces in the crowd's possession, the technical focus tends to be less about individuation and detail rather than its dynamism: whether in flight from the rifles of police, in desperate riot for food, or marching into battle, the crowd was invested in the woodcut's own forms of struggle.

In terms of style, the propaganda posters of the Cultural Revolution bear little resemblance to the modern woodcut art Lu Xun supported in the 1930s. The bright explosions of color, along with the upright and muscular physiques of the figures the depict, and the ubiquitous radiance of Chairman Mao comprise a vision of the masses completely at odds with the shadowy, bleak world of the pioneers of the modern

woodcut. Yet, in the way that their respective processes of reproduction play a significant role in performing their function as propaganda, the two types of visual media share a common basis. Their shared *technological* operations constitute what is generally referred to as mass media, that is, a form of communication intended to maximize its audience. Mass media propaganda like this interpellates its audience by replicating what Rey Chow calls the "projectional mechanism," as the technologized, reproducible, mass object they see on posters and in film.[74] Through this visual projection, the medium of the poster carries more than its image, but the very dynamic that constructs the mass. Or, recalling Belting's anthropological approach to image and body, the collective spectator addressed in posters are more than just a passive audience, but in turn are construed as a medium — a mass medium — that embodies, processes, and transmits images as well. In Jeffrey Schnapp's words, propaganda posters serve as an "idealizing mirror in which the collectivity can gaze upon itself either in action or as the background for necessary social change."[75] This dynamic of visual reciprocity between image and crowd was staged on a massive scale in the Cultural Revolution, a mechanism propelling revolutionary fervor into collective excess.

The institutionalization of the propaganda poster began soon after 1949, and the first professional propaganda poster team was established in 1954 in Shanghai.[76] Until the outbreak of the Cultural Revolution, when the publishing houses' studios were

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[74] Rey Chow, *Primitive Passions*, 33.

[75] Schnapp, Jeffrey T. *Revolutionary Tides: The Art of the Political Poster, 1914-1989*. Milan: Skira, 2005. 38.

[76] Shen, Kuiyi. "Propaganda Posters and Art During the Cultural Revolution." *Art and China's Revolution*, 156.

dismantled, art publishers reproduced thousands of different poster designs in print runs that could top 50,000 copies. Though most of the designs for these posters were created by professional teams in the publishing houses and were painted by professors and artists at national art academies, amateur painting was encouraged and celebrated.[77] It was also during the 1950s that the visualization of the crowd began to swell. During the Great Leap Forward, a massive campaign of industrialization and production, technological progress was necessarily pictured as a collective triumph, and highly idealized images of impossibly huge crop and manufacturing yields projected bounty and plentitude, despite the fact that tens of millions were dying in the midst of the campaign's failure and widespread famine. Though in general the posters of the late 1950s and early 1960s were celebratory and cheerful with a more muted color scheme that recalls Shanghai calendars and advertisements of the 1930s, the impulse toward visual excess seen in the Leap's accompanying propaganda campaign

Fig. 3.15 The 1959 poster *The Vegetables Are Green, the Cucumbers Plumb, the Yield Aabundant* (Cailü guafei chanliang duo 菜綠瓜肥產量多) was pained by Jin Meisheng 金梅生, who formerly painted calander posters of seductive beauties in 1930s Shanghai (*Chineseposters..net*. http://chineseposters.net/gallery/e11-992.php. Accessed 27 August 2012.).

[77] Instructional guides and copybooks gave budding artists both political and formal directions for creating propaganda, and included pictures of model works as well as graphic examples of certain recurring types of figures. One such guide published in 1959 emphasizes the role of propaganda thusly: "Due to the duties that propaganda pictures carry out, it's intimate relationship with the masses is made clear. 由於政治宣傳畫所負擔的任務，決定了它和群眾的密切聯繫。" *Zenme hua xuanchuanhua* 怎麼畫宣傳畫 (How to Paint Propaganda Pictures). Ed. Xia Hong 夏洪. Shanghai: Renmin meishu chubanshe, 1959. 2.

testifies to the ideological investment in the notion of multiplicity that goes beyond idealism. These works' portrayals of abundance and profusion speak through a rhetoric of plentitude, expanding the productive partnership between technological production and the propagating crowd.

Fig. 3.16 The cover for the July 1958 issue of the magazine *Shanghai Industry and Commerce* (Shanghai gongshang 上海工商) shows the visual bond between the crowd and technological progress (Minick, Scott and Jiao Ping. *Chinese Graphic Design in the Twentieth Century*. London: Thames and Hudson, 1990. 111.).

During the Cultural Revolution, when schools and art academies were shut down, posters were created by "propaganda units" (*xuanchuan dui* 宣傳隊) organized and composed of Red Guards and other students. Produced in response to specific events or upon the announcements of new ideological campaigns, the enthusiasm for postering reached a fever pitch during the Red Guard years of the Cultural Revolution, and numerous exhibitions involving hundreds of Red Guard groups were organized in 1967 and 1968.[78] The efforts to create a "red sea" (*hong haiyang* 紅海洋) in these years involved covering every available public surface with revolutionary slogans and portraits of Mao even led the Central Committee to issue a proclamation restraining

[78] For a summary of a couple of Red Guard art exhibitions and publications, see Wang Mingxian. "From Red Guard Art to Contemporary Art." *Burden or Legacy: From the Cultural Revolution to Contemporary Art*. Ed. Jiang Jiehong. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2007. 36-43.

Fig. 3.17 Unknown artist, *With the Proletariat United, and the Workers, Peasants, and Soldiers United, We Will Definitely Liberate Taiwan* (Wuchanjieji heqilai gongnongbing heqilai yiding jiefang Taiwan 無產階級合起來工農兵合起來一定要解放台灣), late 1960s.

the practice.[79] The urge to revolutionize the landscape in a sea of red paint constitutes, in the reading I have provided so far, a zeal to construct a totalized collective, a singular revolutionary unit the spreads itself across the globe. The official sanctioning of this dynamic exhorted artists to "follow the line of 'from the masses, to the masses' 要依靠群眾，從群眾中來，到群眾中去" in order to "achieve the unity of revolutionary political content and the best possible artistic form. 力求達到革命的政治內容和盡可能完美的藝術形式的統一。"[80] Crowds pervade the posters of the Cultural Revolution. In my overview of these posters, I identify four interrelated types of crowd depiction: as the

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[79] See Benewick, Robert. "Icons of Power: Mao Zedong and the Cultural Revolution." *Picturing Power in the People's Republic of China*, 124.

[80] Lin Biao 林彪 and Jiang Qing 江青. *Lin Biao tongzhi weituo Jiang Qing tongzhi zhaokai de budui wenyi gongzuo zuotanhui jiyao* 林彪同志委托江青同志召开的部队文艺工作座談会紀要 (Summary of the Forum on the Work in Literature and Art in the Armed Forces with which Comrade Lin Biao Entrusted Comrade Jiang Qing). Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1967. 19. English in "The Shanghai Policy." *Five Chinese Communist Plays*. Ed. Martin Ebon. New York: The John Day Company, 1975. 15-16.

mass ornament, the muscular body, the self-reflexive, and, perhaps most importantly, the figure of Chairman Mao.

As explained above, in Kracauer's definition of the mass ornament projects the crowd as more than a symbol of the nation, but a mode of organization and a process of production. What is being produced, in Kracauer's insight, is nothing less than a system of subjectivity that sublimates the function of the individual to the greater mass; "It is the complete triumph of the ornamental over the human," Kracauer writes.[81] Propaganda posters employed a variety of techniques and symbols that not only convey the sense of ideal unity of the masses, but also its expansive potential. Most typical of these are the representative types — figures from the categories identified by Mao as constitutive of the masses, the worker, peasant, and soldier (*gong nong bing* 工農兵) — that are most prominent in foreground. The crowd that follows these figures stretches into the distance, and requires less individuation and detail. Lowell Dittmer notes that in the "polemical symbolism" of Cultural Revolution rhetoric, the element most associated with the correct revolutionary enthusiasm is light, symbolized by the color red (Mao and his Thought are associated commonly with the "red sun" [*hong taiyang* 紅太陽]).[82] The color red is displayed most unmistakably in the red flags that the crowd carries, billowing over the unseen masses under them. Flags not only contribute to the creation of a "sea of red," but surely save the artist the trouble of attempting to depict such a massive gathering. An additional bearer of redness takes the form of the "Little Red Book" carried by crowds

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[81] Kracauer, Siegfried. *From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of the German Film*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1947. 94.

[82] Dittmer, Lowell. *China's Continuous Revolution: The Post-Liberation Era 1949-1981*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987. 81-82.

most distinguished members. *Quotations from Chairman Mao* (Mao zhuxi yulu 毛主席語錄), a distillation of Mao Zedong Thought, was, like the posters themselves, a remarkable achievement of reproduction, with 720 million copies being produced and distributed between 1964 and 1967.[83] Adorning the crowd within the poster, these symbols of the crowd synecdochically stand for it, and vice versa. The accessories of the crowd like flags and books (and we could also include guns, fountain pens, industrial equipment, balloons, and other ideological symbols) serve, like the poster itself, as an attachment to the crowd, an appendage demonstrating plentitude and the ideological power of multiplicity.

As the intensity for the Cultural Revolution increased, the visual styles grew more extreme as "previous inhibitions against images that might appear to threaten those regarded as 'the people,' often crossing the line between exhortation and coercion" were disregarded.[84] Bodies distorted muscularly in displays of power and embodiments of the masses merge, expand, and multiply into impossible huge seas stretching into the distance. As restrictions of acceptable content grew more inflexible and artists utilized an increasingly set of tropes and designs, the stylization of the crowd continued to push against mimetic limits. Indivisibility between the individual members of the crowd emphasizes a loss of corporeal selfhood that occurs in the sublime crowd experience, but also gives the impression of the legitimization of Mao's Cultural Revolution policies from the bottom up. In *A Truly Great Wall* (Weida de changcheng 偉大的長城), the

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[83] Lei, Oliver Han. "Sources and Early Printing History of Chairman Mao's 'Quotations'." *The American Bibliographical Society*. 10 January 2004. http://www.bibsocamer.org/bibsite/han/index.html. Accessed 27 August 2012.

[84] Gittings, John. "Excess and Enthusiasm." *Picturing Power in the People's Republic of China,* 32.

Fig. 3.18 A film poster for the 1967 propaganda documentary *Chairman Mao Is Eternally Together with Us* (Mao zhuxi yongyuan he women zai yiqi 毛主席永遠和我們在一起; unkown artist) utilizes the "Little Red Book as crowd enhancer (*Zhongguo dianying jingdian haibao diancang* 中國電影經典海報典藏 [Collection of Classic Posters of Chinese Films. Ed. Zhao Dongming 趙東鳴. Beijing: Zhongguo dianying chubanshe, 2006. 162.).

Fig. 3.19 In the 1965 woodblock print *Draw Out the Counter-revolutionary Revisionists and Expose Them to the People!* (Ba fangeming xiuzhengzhuyi jiu fenzi chulai shizhong! 把反革命修正主義分子揪出來示眾！), the fountain pen is used as the crowd's weapon of choice (and also the tool by which to draw a crowd [*shizhong*]). (Cushing, Lincoln and Ann Tompkins. *Chinese Posters: Art from the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution*. San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2007. 110.).

bodies of the line of soldiers merge together to create a gigantic, impenetrable force against which the caricatures of American and Russian leaders (along with Liu Shaoqi) are rendered puny and ineffectual, thrown backwards just by the sheer mass of the crowd's formation. The faces of the soldiers, identical and stylized, grow more indistinct as they carry the eye toward the horizon. Another poster from a few years earlier, *When the Army and People Are United as One, Who in the World Can Oppose Us?* (Jun min tuanjie ru yiren, shikan tianxia shei neng di 軍民團結如一人試看天下誰能敵) uses a similar technique of body fusion to appear unified, the redness of their shared body replicated in the procession of red flags behind them. While bodies are not fused in the same way in *Strengthen Yourself by Confronting High Waves and Mighty Winds* (Dao dafeng dalang zhong qu duanlian 到大風大浪中去鍛煉), the visual and rhetorical effect is similar in the "meeting of two great collective nouns, the People and the Sea."[85] In other cases, the bulging muscles need no body to maintain their collective force against the revisionist enemies, whose puny presence heightens the confrontation between the united collective and its sickly, pathetic opponents. The notion of a "body politic" that endows the modern crowd with representational sovereignty is taken to extreme, distorted lengths.

What I am calling the reflexive crowd refers to the way some posters depict cultural production, of which the posters are themselves a part. Another variation on this theme is the portrayal of an interior political consciousness emanating from the foregrounded subject of the poster. These posters create a kind of mise-en-abyme; the

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[85] Haun Saussy's annotation in Jeffrey T. Schnapp, *Revolutionary Tides*, 124.

Fig. 3.20 Unknown artist, *A Truly Great Wall* (*Weida de changcheng* 偉大的長城; 1967) (Jeffrey T. Schnapp, *Revolutionary Tides*. 33.).

Fig. 3.21 Unknown artist, *When the Army and People Are United as One, Who in the World Can Oppose Us?* (*Jun min tuanjie ru yiren, shikan tianxia shei neng di!* 軍民團結如一人試看天下誰能敵; c. 1963.) (Lincoln Cushing and Ann Tompkins, *Chinese Posters*, 74.).

Fig. 3.22 Peng Zhaomin 彭召民, *Strengthen Yourself by Confronting High Waves and Mighty Winds* (Dao dafeng dalang zhong qu duanlian 到大風大浪中去鍛煉; 1976) (Jeffrey T. Schnapp, *Revolutionary Tides*, 30.).

Fig. 3.23-24 The 1967 poster *Struggle Against Anti-Revolutionary Revisionist Elements* (Douzheng fangeming xiuzhengzhuyi fenzi 鬥爭反革命修正主義分子; unknown artist) (left) uses the fist as an anatomical crystallization of the crowd's mighty will, while *Overthrow Soviet Revisionism!* (Dadao Su xiu! 打倒蘇修！; unknown artist, 1967) multiplies the collective fist into a crowd (left, *Chinese Posters*, 125.).

outward display of private thoughts, rather than revealing an inner psyche, leads the viewer to the very act that has produced the poster. These posters uphold the officially sanctioned models every citizen should aspire to be like, drawn from a roster of revolutionary martyrs or from the characters of the model operas (*yangbanxi* 樣板戲). In *Read Revolutionary Books, Learn from Revolutionaries, and Become an Heir of the Revolution* (Du geming shu, xue geming ren, dang geming jiebanren 讀革命書 學革命人 當革命接班人), a young girl imagines the heroic sacrifices of a host of martyrs while she reads the book *Stories of Lei Feng* (Lei Feng de gushi 雷鋒的故事) (on the cover of which, Lei Feng is reading *Selected Works of Chairman Mao*). The images that she pictures are drawn from other famous propaganda posters, creating an ideal dynamic of image reception, internalization, and visualization. The message of the work fashions the possibility of a revolutionary lineage, which, like the crowd image of *Prairie Fire*, is based the collective memory of death and loss. The viewer of this poster is in turn expected to model himself or herself after the poster's protagonist. Instead of pursuing the sacred archetypes in the poster's background, however, what is transmitted is the process of modeling, reproducing the bodily acts of reproduction. Writer Anchee Min writes how this poster's inspired to her to draw propaganda images for her school's "blackboard newspaper" (*heibanbao* 黑板報): "My hands were swollen from frostbite and I could barely hold the chalk. But I was inspired by the heroes and heroines in the posters, and I believed that hardship would only toughen me and make me strong."[86] In some ways, this is the aim of every propaganda poster, to initiate a self-multiplying chain

[86] See Anchee Min's essay "The Girl in the Poster" in *Chinese Propaganda Posters*, 5.

Fig. 3.25 Unknown artist, *Read Revolutionary Books, Learn from Revolutionaries, and Become an Heir of the Revolution* (Du geming shu, xue geming ren, dang geming jiebanren 讀革命書 學革命人 當革命接班人; 1974) (*Chinese Propaganda Posters*. Köln: Taschen, 2003. 4.).

Fig. 3.26 The dynamic of transmission and visualization produced by the crowd medium is also present in many works that feature cheering spectators of Model Operas, such as *Revolutionary People Love to Watch Revolutionary Model Operas* (Gemingren aikan geming yangbanxi 革命人愛看革命樣板戲, Luo Yaotang 駱耀棠,1976) (*Tōhō no irasutorēshon posutā ten Chūgoku, Kankoku, Nihon* 東方のイラストレーションポスター展 中国・韓国・日本 [Illustration Posters in China, Korea, Japan]. Ed. Takashi Akiyama 秋山 孝. Tokyo: Tama Art University, 2007. 73.).

of revolutionary signs and symbols. What is explicitly produced through this type of poster is cultural reproduction as a revolutionary means. In this way, the crowd is represented through the act of looking, and in turn, transmitting, similar images of self-conscious plurality.

The variety of methods that were used to depict the crowd are most fully realized and intensified in the image of Chairman Mao. The Great Helmsman's looming singularity serves as a transcendent producer of wholeness, and sets it into motion. Likewise, the crowd image reciprocates in this dynamic by projecting its plenitude upon the Chairman; the hosts of portraits, banners, placards, and even badges that adorned every rally of the Cultural Revolution created a mirror of Maos reflected in the throngs. Perhaps most significant with respect to the dynamic and reciprocal relationship between the masses and Mao is the Chairman's central role as the arbiter of history. Ban Wang writes how the "solemn aura of history-making" that suffused the Maoist era climaxed during the Cultural Revolution, when millions were galvanized in its name.[87] One of the principal inquires of Chapter Four is how the crowd is to be pictured in the absence of such a transcendent figure as Mao. That chapter asks, What becomes of the image of this utopian mass following the loss of its ideological and historical animator? This brief conclusion, on the other hand, considers the image of Mao as the ultimate embodiment of crowd aesthetics in twentieth-century China.

The larger-than-life portrayal of Mao has existed at least since 1949. With some exceptions, however, the general tone of propaganda art and posters in the first decade of

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[87] Ban Wang, *The Sublime Figure of History*, 6.

Fig. 3.27 *A Life of Struggle Produces Art, the Laboring People Are the Masters* (Douzheng shenghuo chu yishu laodong renmin shi zhuren 鬥爭生活出藝術勞動人民是主人; Wang Weixin 王維新 and Wang Liguo 王利國, 1974) depicts a "peasant artist" painting a mural. In the early to mid-1970s, amateur artists from the countryside (especially from Hu county (Huxian 戶縣) were upheld as model painters whose work was exhibited in China and internationally.

Fig. 3.28-29 Student groups painting propaganda during the Cultural Revolution (left, Wang Mingxian and Yan Shanchun, Xin Zhongguo meishu tushi, 5; right, Li, Zhensheng. *Red-Color News Soldier: A Chinese Photographer's Odyssey Through the Cultural Revolution*. New York: Phaidon, 2003, 187.).

Fig. 3.30-31 Crowds of Maos at a political rally in Harbin on June 21, 1968 (left, Li Zhensheng, *Red-Color News Soldier,* 219.), and among commune members in Beijing celebrating the publication of *Chairman Mao Goes to Anyuan* on July 1 (right, Wang Mingxian and Yan Shanchun, *Xin Zhongguo meishu tushi*, 61.).

the PRC seems more intent on humanizing Mao more than deifying him. With the elevation of Mao Zedong Thought through the 1960s, the depiction of Mao grew increasingly aggrandized. Gigantic statues of his likeness were erected, and the production of Chairman Mao badges (*Mao zhuxi xiangzhang* 毛主席像章) increased many times over. Posters that had long carried symbolic reference to him turned those symbols into literal expressions, such as the red sun in the anonymous 1967 poster *Long Live Chairman Mao, the Reddest, Reddest Red Sun in Our Hearts! Long Long Life!* (Women xinzhong zuihong zuihong de hong taiyang Maozhuxi wansui! Wanwansui! 我們心中最紅最紅的紅太陽毛主席萬歲！萬萬歲！). Following the massive rally held in Tiananmen Square on August 18, 1966, and the widespread photograph of Mao receiving the throng of Red Guards from the rostrum, his gesture, part beckon, part send-off, was depicted in thousands of works.[88] The crowds' role in these posters serves to

[88] Yan Shanchun estimates that prints based upon this newspaper photograph (and especially Mao's profile) "has probably been reproduced in greater numbers than any other image." See Yan Shanchun. "Painting Mao." *Art and China's Revolution*, 96.

Fig. 3.32-33 A news photo of Chairman Mao at the August 18, 1966, rally in Tiananmen Square and the woodblock print it inspired, *Follow Chairman Mao to Advance through Great Wind and Waves* (Genzhe Mao zhuxi zai dafeng dalang zhong qianjin 跟著毛主席在大風大浪中前進; Shen Yaoyi 沈堯伊, 1966) (right, Wang Mingxian and Yan Shanchun, *Xin Zhongguo meishu tushi*, 34.).

Fig. 3.34 Unknown artist, *Bombard the Headquarters* (Paoda silingbu 炮打司令部; 1967) (Wang Mingxian and Yan Shanchun, *Xin Zhongguo meishu tushi*, 34.).

both exalt the majesty of his image, but also to receive and carry out his instructions. The 1967 poster *Bombard the Headquarters* (*Paoda silingbu* 炮打司令部), for example, exemplifies the mobilizing effect of Mao's gesture on the crowd. The sublime crowd that stretches into the distance becomes the landscape below Mao's looming body, surging forward at his signal. Mao holds a brush with which he has presumably used to compose his first big-character poster (*dazibao* 大字報), published in early August, 1966. The red brush carries the additional suggestion, however, that Mao is the artist behind the creation of the crowd itself, and, having just finished painting the red mass below, has magically brought it to life as the swarming mass we see. In this way, Mao's image does more than just preside over the crowd, but animates it as a whole, and into wholeness.[89] The totality and unity Mao's image bestows upon the crowd image happens even when he is outside the frame of the picture, as in *Unite to Achieve an Even Greater Victory* (Tuanjie qilai, zhengqu gengda de shengli 團結起來，爭取更大的勝利; Yan Yongsheng 閻永生, n.d.), when we can assume that the gaze of the crowd is toward him, or his image.

Perhaps the most recognizable art piece of the entire decade of the Cultural Revolution is the 1967 oil painting by Liu Chunhua 劉春華, *Chairman Mao Goes to Anyuan*. Praised by Jiang Qing in 1968 and distributed as a full color insert in all the major newspapers and magazines on July 1 of that year, poster images of the painting were disseminated throughout the country on a massive scale; Julia Andrews estimates

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[89] Yang Haocheng's 楊昊成 makes the important distinction between posters that portray Mao directly, and those "indirect" (*jianjie* 間接) that represent his image as a summoned "presence" (*zaichang* 在場): "Due to the invisibility of his real body, Mao Zedong could even able to express a certain kind of mysterious power, and therefore the indirect image of Mao Zedong often radiates with the spiritual light of a religious instrument. 毛澤東甚至因為其真身的隱形而更顯示出某種神秘莫測的力量，間接的毛澤東圖像也因此時常放射出類乎邪教工具的神昇光芒。" See Yang Haocheng. Mao Zedong tuxiang yanjiu 毛澤東圖像研究 (Mao Zedong Iconology). Hong Kong: Hong Kong: Shidai guoji chuban youxian gongsi, 2009. 188.

Fig. 3.35-36 *Long Live Chairman Mao, the Reddest, Reddest Red Sun in Our Hearts! Long Long Life!* (Women xinzhong zuihong zuihong de hong taiyang Maozhuxi wansui! Wanwansui! 我們心中最紅最紅的紅太陽毛主席萬歲！萬萬歲！; unknown artist, 1967.) (left, Lincoln Cushing and Ann Tompkins, *Chinese Posters*, 124.) and *We Wish Chairman Mao Long Life Without End* (Jingzhu Mao zhuxi wanshouwujiang 敬祝毛主席萬壽無疆; unknown artist, 1968) depict the expansive crowds that grew around the intense worhip of Mao (left, *Mao's Graphic Voice: Pictorial Posters from the Cultural Revolution*. Ed. Patricia Powell. Madison: Elvehjern Museum of Art, 1996. 6.).

Fig. 3.37 Yan Yongsheng 閻永生, *Unite to Achieve an Even Greater Victory* (Tuanjie qilai, zhengqu gengda de shengli 團結起來，爭取更大的勝利; n.d.) (Wang Mingxian and Yan Shanchun, *Xin Zhongguo meishu tush*i, 125.).

that more than 900 million images were in circulation at one time, in addition to its likeness adorning mugs, plates, badges, and other objects.[90] Andrews also writes that "the festivities surrounding publication of Liu Chunhua's painting in 1968 appeared to deify the image of Chairman Mao, that is, to treat it as though it were inhabited by the divinity himself."[91] The historical revisionism of the image aside (explained briefly in my discussion of the film *Prairie Fire* above), the painting played a tremendous role in solidifying the cult of worship that surrounded Mao. In light of my discussion in this chapter, however, what is striking about the work is Mao's irreducible singularity; he alone strides through the mountains, his determined eyes pointing toward a revolutionary future that only he can envision. Behind his figure are gathering storm clouds and the vast, mountainous landscape of Jiangxi. In this empty, mist-filled panorama, we can interpolate the masses that would soon fill this void. Chairman Mao in this way becomes the messianic summoner of the masses that will fill the empty space below him. He conjures them into being, and sets them in motion toward the Cultural Revolution, a fulfillment of that originary wish. Liu wrote in 1968 of the effort he, together with other Red Guards, invested in the work, sometimes going without food and sleep, concluding that "Our painting was more than a fruit of collective wisdom, it was a crystallization of the love of millions for Chairman Mao."[92] Not merely another elevation of Mao, Liu's painting also projects the anticipation of the crowd into a specific historical setting in

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[90] Andrews, Julia F. *Painters and Politics in the People's Republic of China, 1949-1979*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994. 339.

[91] Ibid., 342.

[92] Liu Chunhua. "Painting Pictures of Chairman Mao Is Our Greatest Happiness." *China Reconstructs* 17:10 (October 1968). 5-6.

Fig. 3.38-39 *Chairman Mao Goes to Anyuan* (Mao zhuxi qu Anyuan 毛主席去安源; Liu Chunhua 劉春華, 1968) multiplied into a host of reproductions in other visual forms, like badges (right, Wang Mingxian and Yan Shanchun, *Xin Zhongguo meishu tushi*, 66).

Fig. 3.40 In *Marching for a Thousand* li *to Temper a Red Heart* (Qianli yeying lian hongxin 千里野營煉紅心, the mass ornament occupies the "background" of *Chairman Mao Goes to Anyuan* (*Chineseposters..net*. http://chineseposters.net/posters/e13-708.php. Accessed 27 August 2012.).

order to magnify its visceral and overwhelming presence in the present.

In his book on the rhetoric of revolution in China after 1949, Lowell Dittmer notes the extreme polemicism dividing the symbolic imagery of the Cultural Revolution, such as light and darkness, public and private, active and passive, etc. Separating these two realms, Dittmer notes, is a "formidable barrier, variously referred to as a 'line of demarcation,' 'shackles,' a 'fortress,' or (most commonly) 'frame' (*kuangkuang* [框框])" that, according to the Red Guards and other rebels, must be completely smashed and obliterated, thus allowing the enemies of the masses to be exposed and destroyed.[93] In this chapter I have looked at some ways that visual renderings of the crowd also sought to break down the bounds of the conventional image structure and transmit a sense of the collective to the audience. These efforts made use of modern forms of technology and mechanical reproduction found in film and posters that projected the crowd as a kind of "special effect," or even more provocatively, a medium that bridges the production of images with its reception and reproduction. In *Big Road*, the martyred crowd is cinematically resurrected to find new life in those that live on, while in *Prairie Fire* the crowd's dramatic realization of solidarity nevertheless becomes subject to historical censure. The chapter's final section on the crowds in propaganda art and the posters of the Cultural Revolution asserts an even more fervent manifestation of the crowd as medium: the revolutionary impulse that produces the crowd is duplicated millions of time over in these posters and the act of their production and dissemination, ultimately finding

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[93] Lowell Dittmer, *China's Continuous Revolution*, 86.

the perfect expression of totality and wholeness in the image of Mao. The frames that are conventionally assumed to contain the effects of the image strain under the proliferation of the crowd figure.

CHAPTER FOUR
"HUMAN WAVE TACTICS":
ZHANG YIMOU, CINEMATIC RITUAL, AND THE SPECTACULAR CROWD

Introduction: The Persistence of the Crowd

This chapter examines the transformation of the crowd figure in Chinese film during the era of reform. Following the death of Chairman Mao and the political and economic liberalization under Deng Xiaoping 鄧小平, cultural production in China shifted away from the political formulas and character typification that peaked in the Cultural Revolution. As the notion of the "mass line" gradually lost is ideological sway, space was opened for the artistic expression of private feelings and individual life experiences distinct from the crowd. At the same time, writers, artists, and filmmakers began to question some of the foundational precepts of the modern Chinese nation, including the ideological principles and historical narratives built up throughout the Maoist period. Rather than dispersing, the figure of the crowd consequently became an object of contemplation and scrutiny. As both a remnant of the revolutionary heritage that codified and maximized it and simultaneously a lost possibility of national and collective realization, the crowd remains a powerful reminder of China's "red legacy." Mass formation in contemporary China is evoked in a variety of ways, from the cynical, kitschy use of revolutionary symbols in present-day art markets, to the crowds of savvy consumers that pack the streets, malls, theaters, and stadiums to revel in their collective buying power, to the increasingly frequent demonstrations in villages and industrial towns against governmental corruption and environmental exploitation, and even in the

online multitudes of anonymous Internet users. While these types of crowds have dissimilar aims and contrasting ideologies, what they share is a visual potency in mass representation that, I am arguing, is based in part on a politics of remembering, and forgetting, the Maoist era. Often the connection to the revolutionary past is made explicit (many village protests consciously employ the rhetoric of nationalist grievance in their efforts to get the government to listen), and sometimes the effect is a ghostly reminder of the tremendous loss and suffering the masses have endured in the name of politics. What I show below is how the crowd image not only has persisted in recent and contemporary China, but has revived similar questions of the constitution and representation of the masses in China that I have examined throughout this dissertation.

I conclude this dissertation with an overview of the career of the filmmaker Zhang Yimou, who, having grown up in the midst of the Cultural Revolution (and, because of his politically suspect family background, was a victim of its excesses), is on very familiar terms with the crowd image. Though his early films are marked by a powerful and profound use of nature, desolation, and ambiguity, his later work makes copious use of the crowd's ability to generate feelings of grandeur and spectacularity. I trace the figure of the crowd across his career in order to demonstrate the ongoing fascination artists have with forming and representing crowds, as well as the continued presence of many of same dilemmas posed by crowds that confounded and inspired many of the subjects of this dissertation. In my discussion of Zhang's work, I employ a rearward glance. Beginning with his phenomenal direction of the 2008 Beijing Olympics' Opening Ceremonies, which I juxtapose with his likewise recently directed blockbusters

Hero (Yingxiong 英雄) and *Curse of the Golden Flower* (Mancheng jindai huangjin jia 滿城盡帶黃金甲), I focus on the contemporary implications of his massive deployment of the crowd. Next, I revisit his early work as a cinematographer on the Fifth Generation classics *One and Eight* (Yige he bage 一個和八個) and *The Big Parade* (Dayue bing 大閱兵), before concluding with a brief reading of his directorial debut *Red Sorghum* (Hong gaoliang 紅高粱). To provide a point of comparison and debate, I conclude this chapter by looking at the recent blockbuster *Aftershock* directed by Feng Xiaogang and its reconstruction of a collective memory from the remnants of national trauma.

Zhang Yimou, Cinematic Ritual, and a Technology of Crowds

Under the creative direction of master filmmaker Zhang Yimou, the 2008 Beijing Olympic Opening Ceremonies drew upon China's rich cultural resources and seemingly unlimited assets of both capital and manpower to exhibit an unprecedented visual and technological extravaganza seen by almost two billion people around the world. While the massive exhibition undeniably testified to China's emergence as a global juggernaut in the twenty-first century and won an enormous amount of commendation for its spectacular achievement, the Ceremonies' medium of crowds, the mass choreography and synchronized performance that structured its impressionistic narrative, unsettled many observers. Zhang's staging of such "human wave tactics" (*renhai zhanshu* 人海戰術) not only partakes of the global imaginary of masses and multitudes made emblematic during the twentieth century's "era of crowds," but also evokes the powerful and haunting visual

legacy of the Maoist era.[1] In this chapter, I argue that Zhang's Opening Ceremonies expresses the notion of a "red legacy" both in how it re-engages with the questions of mass representation at the heart of China's revolutionary narrative, as well as in how it informs the changing notion of the crowd's role in the post-revolutionary era beginning in the 1980s. The uncanny Olympic staging of the crowd in 2008 thus marks a haunting return of the spectacular masses, resurrected for the very ritual celebrating China's ascendance to the global stage.

At the same time, Zhang's use of the crowd at the Opening Ceremonies alerts us to the way his own distinctly post-revolutionary film corpus inquires into the visual, narrative, and ideological dilemmas posed by the crowd image. A closer look at Zhang's work as both a director and a cinematographer reveals a persistent interest with the undeniable power and continuing resonance of the crowd image, suggesting a keen awareness of the possibilities and contradictions of collective representation, the dynamic of visual desire between spectator and spectacle, and the particular entanglement of the crowd image and historical authority. From his early work as a Fifth Generation cinematographer for *One and Eight* (dir. Zhang Junzhao 張軍釗, 1983; co-cinematographer with Xiao Feng 肖風) and *The Big Parade* (dir. Chen Kaige 陈凯歌, 1986), to his more recent historical epics *Hero* (2002) and *Curse of the Golden Flower* (2006), examining the use of the crowd image in Zhang's work provides a certain measure of continuity within his highly variable film career, while also bringing into focus the visual legacy inherited from the Chinese revolutionary culture. While on one

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[1] In his 1896 treatise *La psychologie des foules,* Gustave Le Bon famously (and ominously) predicted "the age we are about to enter will in truth be the ERA OF CROWDS." See Le Bon, *The Crowd*, xv.

hand his restaging of the crowd image takes part in the active forgetting of the revolutionary imperative by adopting the spectacular value of such images for service in the global marketplace, Zhang Yimou's use of the crowd simultaneously speaks to the revolution's unfinished business. Working in the age of the deterioration of revolutionary ideology, when the *telos* of its historical narrative is fading into the past, Zhang's films appropriate the crowd image in a way that both deconstructs the ontology of the collective subject, yet also rebuilds it in service of contemporary political and commercial purposes.

Zhang's repeated use of the crowd image is characterized especially by two interrelated notions that run throughout my readings of his work: ideological ritual and the technologies of mass reproduction. In the films I examine below, the crowd serves as a ritualizing agent that both gives form to the abstract, qualitative idea of the masses and marks the image it produces as a medium of expansion with the potential to produce a "perfect circuit," to borrow Haun Saussy's term, of spectacularity between image and the audience.[2] Ritual enacts the crowd formation to imagine, reconstruct, and project a unified social body in, according to the authors of *Ritual and Its Consequences*, the subjunctive tense, "the creation of an order *as if* it were truly the case."[3] This approach to ritual also foregrounds the artifice of Zhang's crowd forms, drawing attention to the

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[2] Haun Saussy, "Crowds, Number and Mass in China," 259.

[3] Adam B. Seligman, Robert P. Weller, Michael J. Puett and Bennett Simon, *Ritual and Its Consequences,* 20. Haiyan Lee deserves credit for first making the connection between this book and the 2008 Olympic Opening Ceremonies in a post for the China Beat blog, "It's Right to Party, En Masse" (since published in *China in 2008*).

impossibility of achieving the wholeness they point toward.[4] The inherent ambiguity displayed in the ritualizing crowd also allows Zhang some room to maneuver around the overly didactic pitfalls of political filmmaking, as shown below in his defense against the charges of using "human wave tactics." In the Maoist period, as well, the constant refiguring of belonging and exclusion (of which Zhang Yimou and his family were victims), drove a continual restaging of revolutionary devotion in material practice (a target of absurdist critique in *To Live* [*Huozhe* 活著, 1994], for example).[5] The kind of contrived ritual that saturates his films, a point of both admiration and criticism,[6] and his use of the crowd in these contexts is crucial to understanding the visual legacy of the crowd he inherits.

While ritual suggests the crowd's role as a mediator between the symbolic and the real, Zhang's films also testify to the crowd's intimate relationship with technological media. The emergence of the crowd in modern consciousness is rooted not just to the conceptual notions of imagining it, but even more fundamentally to the technological means of showing it. In a footnote to his famous essay on the work of art, Walter Benjamin discusses how, through the developing technologies of photography, sound recording, and most importantly film, "the masses are brought face to face with

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[4] The authors of *Ritual and Its Consequences* also note how the effectiveness of ritual "in part arises from the sense that one never creates a full unity, but one can, through ritual, develop more productive ways of connecting with other people and with the larger world." Adam B. Seligman, et al, *Ritual and Its Consequences*, 42.

[5] Zhang's father was labeled as "historically anti-revolutionary" for his service in the Nationalist Army prior to 1949. See Paul Clark, *Reinventing China*, 15-16; and Ni Zhen, *Memoirs from the Beijing Film Academy*, 44-50. The rhetorical query, "Who are our enemies? Who are our friends? This is a question of the first importance for the revolution," from the 1926 essay, "Analysis of the Classes in Chinese Society" (Zhongguo shehui ge jieji de fenxi 中國社會各階級的分析) opens the collection of Mao's selected works. See Mao Zedong, *Mao Zedong xuanji*, Vol. 1, 3.

[6] See for example Donald S. Sutton, "Ritual, History, and the Films of Zhang Yimou."

themselves," and states plainly, "Mass reproduction is aided especially by the reproduction of the masses."[7] The technological, and specifically visual, methods of propaganda employed on a vast scale during the Maoist era propagated not only the ideological call of revolution, but also the medium of the crowd itself. Interpellation is carried by replicating what Rey Chow calls the "projectional mechanism of filmic projection" — the technologized, reproducible, mass object the audience sees in posters and film.[8] Zhang Yimou's works demonstrate this mechanism at work diegetically (as in the Opening Ceremonies' collective celebration of the "Four Great Inventions" [*si da faming* 四大發明)], but also in his extra-diegetic commitment to spectacle as the best way of attracting a commercial audience. The crowd itself can be seen as a kind of peculiarly cinematic effect, neither purely ideological nor market-driven, but a modern invention that reshapes and multiplies bodies, onscreen and off.

Zhang Yimou's "red legacy" is therefore not limited to direct and ostensible depictions of China's revolutionary history, but may also be recognized in his approaches to representing and mobilizing crowds. Throughout his career he has deployed the crowd image in a variety of methods, evidence of a long-held engagement with questions fundamental to the structure and subject of Chinese history. The proliferation of crowd image in nearly all facets of social and visual life during the Cultural Revolution (surpassed in magnitude and sublimity only by the figure of Mao, himself a key figure in the crowd's constitution), constitutes for Zhang a framework of historical narration that he has repeatedly challenged, deconstructed, amplified, and exalted over the course of his

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[7] Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," 251.

[8] Rey Chow, *Primitive Passions*, 33.

career. My selection of films for analysis in this chapter (which passes over his directorial efforts in the 1990s) is not meant to imply a uniform approach to Zhang's dealings with the crowd; rather, by starting with the Olympic Games Opening Ceremonies and his recent imperial epics *Hero* and *Curse of the Golden Flower* before jumping back to his earlier cinematographic work in the 1980s, I mean both to complicate the conventional reading of his later work (as an appeal to authoritarianism and even fascist aesthetics) by juxtaposing it with his initial, deconstructive inquiries into the nature of the Chinese masses, as well as to suggest that this inquiry has persisted and continues to yield new figurations.

Human Wave Tactics: The Olympic Crowd in 2008

Analysis of the 2008 Beijing Olympics Opening Ceremonies promptly focused on the event as spectacle, the twin markers of which were the massive crowd formations (some 15,000 performers were used in the 50-minute presentation) and the innovative technology (most notably the gigantic LED scroll unrolled on the stadium floor). Taken together, these aspects comprised a language of people and technology, through which China would, in Geremie Barmé's words, "speak directly to the world of China's vision of itself."[9] This stylized narrative of cultural history and technological innovation, as it moves from mythic recitation of Confucian aphorisms and elaborate exhibitions of three of the "Four Great Inventions" to shining, youthful visions of a high-tech future, nearly

[9] Barmé, Geremie R. "China's Flat Earth: History and 8 August 2008." *China Quarterly* 197 (March 2009). 64. Barmé's detailed analysis of the Ceremonies and their cultural, political, and historical context is an exceptional resource.

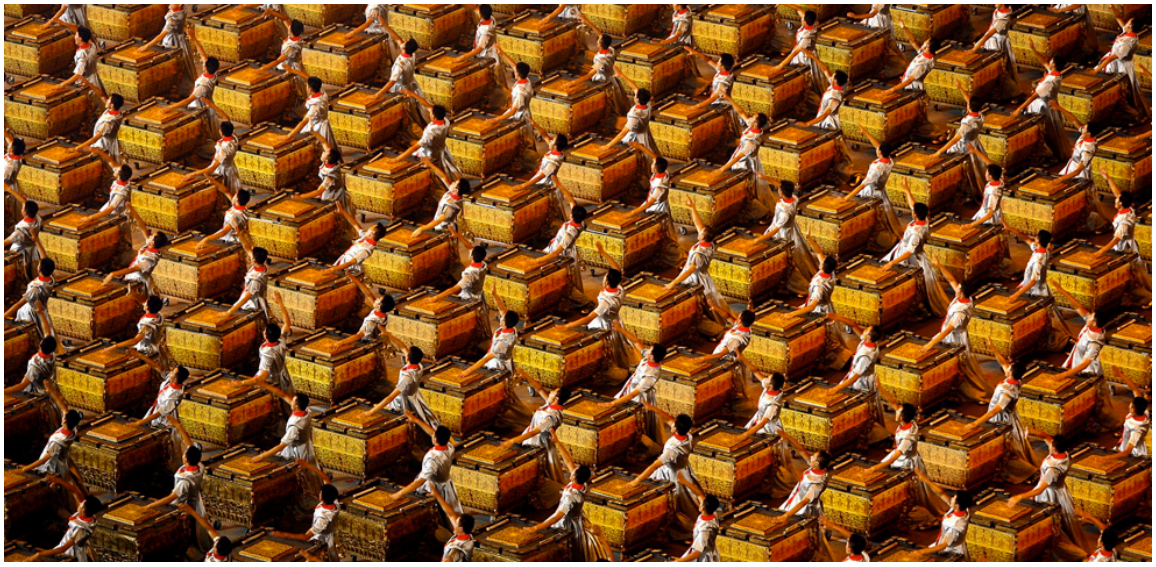

Fig. 4.1 The countdown segment of the Opening Ceremonies featured 2,008 *fou* drummers. ("The Big Picture," *Boston.com* 2008 August 8.).

entirely omits depiction of China's revolutionary past.[10] It is instead in the medium of the crowd, constant throughout the performance, that we discern a visual link to the revolutionary heritage of contemporary China.

While the success of the Opening Ceremonies garnered principal director Zhang Yimou heaps of praise in the international and domestic media for his creatively "human-powered" use of technology and visually arresting style, his use of the crowd image remains the primary point of unsettled criticisms and has provoked a range of

[10] The first act was titled "Brilliant Civilization" (*canlan wenming* 燦爛文明), while the second half was called "Glorious Age" (*huihuang shidai* 輝煌時代). See Geremie Barmé, "China's Flat Earth," 69-70.

commentary that never strayed too far from the political.[11] Whether menacing or hospitable, the image of the Chinese crowd image consistently evokes questions of nation and political representation, or as one *New Yorker* correspondent, perhaps echoing Siegfried Kracauer, succinctly wonders, "what kind of society is it that can afford to make patterns out of its people?"[12] National pomp and lavish production are inevitable elements expected of any Olympic Games, but the foregrounding of the crowd image in the 2008 Opening Ceremonies in Beijing not only set the bar high in terms of extravagance and spectacle, but also intensified a long-simmering apprehension over the significance of collective representation.

The crowd image was a particular point of sarcastic criticism of the domestic Chinese netizen reaction to the Opening Ceremonies. Even on the semi-official discussion forum "Strong Nation" (*Qiangguo luntan* 強國論壇), part of the state-run People's Daily website, one commenter wondered during the show, "What does China have except people?" while another responder noted acerbically, "This kind of opening

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[11] Columnist David Brooks echoes the sensationalist press of the late nineteenth century, drawing a trembling distinction between the "individualist" Western societies and the "collectivist" Asians in his editorial a few days later, concluding forbodingly, "the ideal of a harmonious collective [referring to Hu Jintao's signature propaganda campaign for the "harmonious society" (*hexie shehui* 和諧社會)] may turn out to be as attractive as the ideal of the American Dream." Brooks' column, thoroughly excoriated online by commentators less ignorant of China's political and cultural history, betrays a deep anxiety on the part of the mainstream American media toward images of Chinese crowds and perpetuates the hackneyed trope of a menacing "oriental horde" threatening the foundations of Western democratic society. See Brooks, David. "Harmony and the Dream." *New York Times* 12 August 2008. http://www.nytimes.com/2008/08/12/opinion/12brooks.html. Accessed 27 August 2012. For a roundup of reactions to Brooks' column from frequent China commentators like James Fallows at the Atlantic and John Pomfret of Newsweek, see Ng, Elliott. "The Online Evisceration of David Brooks." *CNReviews* 18 August 2008. http://cnreviews.com/china_cultural_differences/david-brooks-china_20080818.html. Accessed 27 August 2012. For a linguist's take on Brooks' abuse of science, see Liberman, Mark. "David Brooks, Social Psychologist." *Language Log* 13 August 2008. http://languagelog.ldc.upenn.edu/nll/?p=478. Accessed 27 August 2012.

[12] Lane, Anthony. "The Only Games in Town: Week One at the Olympics." *The New Yorker* 25 August 2008. http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2008/08/25/080825fa_fact_lane. Accessed 27 August 2012.

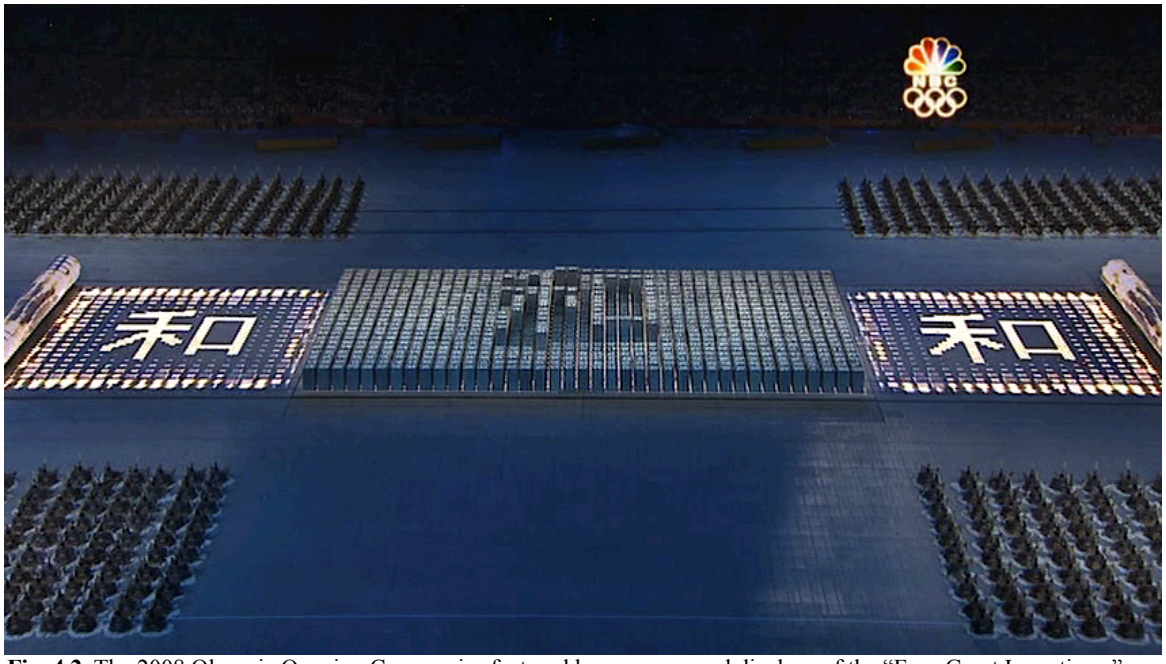

Fig. 4.2 The 2008 Olympic Opening Ceremonies featured human-powered displays of the "Four Great Inventions." Here, hundreds of performers arrange printing blocks to form the character for "harmony."

ceremony is possible only in China, because nobody else has that many people."[13] Some of the most biting criticisms accused Zhang of employing "human wave tactics," a negative term leveled at Zhang's film work (especially *Hero* and *Curse of the Golden Flower*, discussed below) as well. Originally a militaristic phrase describing a massed headlong attack on the frontlines that favors overwhelming scale over strategic maneuvering (a technique used extensively by the PLA army in the Korea and elsewhere),[14] the Chinese term took on new meaning in the reform era. Nowadays the phrase disparages theatrical and cinematic productions that overcompensate for their lack of narrative substance with attempts to galvanize the audience with pointless crowd

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[13] Commenters quoted in a *China Times* (Zhongguo shibao 中國時報) article (no longer online). English translation posted on Roland Soong's blog, *EastSouthWestNorth.* See Soong, Roland. "Chinese Internet Reacts to Olympics Opening Ceremony." *EastSouthWestNorth* 8 August 2008. http://zonaeuropa.com/20080808_1.htm. Accessed 27 August 2012.

[14] Edward C. O'Dowd's examination of the paradox of the PLA's use of *renhai zhanshu* as it was deployed in the Sino-Vietnam War of 1979 is relevant here, especially his discussion of the importance of the soldiers' political devotion in using such a technique. See O'Dowd, Edward C. *Chinese Military Strategy in the Third Indochina War: The Last Maoist War*. New York: Routledge, 2007. 143-155.

formations. The cynical turn indicated by its contemporary usage suggests that staged crowd formations are not only perceived as inherently and overtly political, but also as symptomatic of an age in which revolution itself is a anachronism, and "human wave tactics" an outmoded relic.

Zhang defended his use of so-called "human wave tactics" in an interview with Southern Weekend (*Nanfang zhoumo* 南方週末) in the days following the Opening Ceremonies. According to Zhang, "human wave tactics" are not only a precondition for this kind of "plaza art" (*guangchang yishu* 廣場藝術), but also as a method of maximizing the sensation such a performance is intended to produce:

> If it is an plaza performance, you definitely want to make use of a certain kind of "human wave tactic." You cannot assume that [only] thirty people will be able to pull of the performance, unless it is an avant-garde show; for one thing they will not be visible, and for another thing it looks desolate. This kind of performance must have a kind of fervor, meaning you definitely want tens of thousands manifest on the stage. Technological devices, artificial things, and installations are all lifeless. In this performance, the most soul-stirring and most meaningful is still the human and the things humans give to others.
>
> What is a plaza? The plaza is what maximizes the power produced by people gathered together. Regardless if it is a meeting, a political parade, or a performance, after many people gather together, even if they do nothing there is still a peculiar feeling: this is humanity, the physicality of hearts beating faster, *aiya*, so many people.
>
> From an individual point of view, in his physicality, when he sees so many people gathered together doing something, he will be moved, and produce another kind of aesthetics of feeling psychologically very different. In an arena performance, how can you not use people, many people? If you do use people you get mocked by those who say you're just using "human wave tactics." If I were afraid of this kind of mocking, then I wouldn't use people, but his kind of thinking is absolutely incorrect. As a matter of fact, for any director of such a large-scale plaza performance to not use these tactics, leaving aside how many to use, it will be damned impossible to pull off the show.
>
> 如果是廣場錶演，你一定要使用某種人海戰術，你不能設想30個人在廣場演完，一個是看不清,一個是非常冷清，除非你自己做前衛藝術錶演。這種演出要有激情的東西，你一定要呈現上萬入進去。科技手段，造型的東西、裝置的東西都是死的，在錶演中，最靈動的是人，最有意思的也是人，人給人一種東西。
>
> 甚麼是廣場？廣場就是使最多的人聚在一起會產生一種力量。不管是開會，政治性的游行，還是錶演，聚了很多人之後，甚麼都不做就有一種異樣的感覺，這就是人類，生理人意義上心跳就加快了，嘆呀，這麼多人。
>
> 從人的個體來講，他在生理性上，當他看到這麼多人聚在一起做一件事情的時候，他就會產生感動，他會產生另外一種感覺上的審美，帶來很大的心理不同。你怎麼可能在廣場的錶演中不用人，不用很多人呢?你用就嘲諷你，說你就會人海戰術，要是怕這種嘲諷，那我就不要用人了。這種觀念絕對是錯誤的。實際上任何一個導演在大型廣場錶演中，他要不用，他用多用少單說，他不用這麼多的人，見了鬼了，不可能演下來。[15]

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[15] Zhang Ying 張英 and Xia Chen 夏辰. "Zhang Yimou jiemi kaimushi 張藝謀解密開幕式" (Zhang Yimou Reveals the Secrets of the Opening Ceremonies). *Nanfang zhoumo* 南方週末 14 August 2008. A3.

For Zhang, the spectacle of a unified crowd performance remains the only viable technique able to generate the distinct psychological effects of both power (*liliang* 力量) and peculiarity (*yiyang* 異樣) of the self, brought about through the immediate physicality (*shengli* 生理) of the crowd image.[16] In his formulation of the affective power of the crowd image, however, Zhang interestingly stresses the public architecture of such an event, the plaza. The Chinese term *guangchang*, literally a public space or square, is indelibly associated with mass movements, and similarly conflates the contradictory associations that make up the crowd. As cultural critic Dai Jinhua 戴錦華 explains, the plaza connotes the revolutionary legacy of protests and campaigns in modern Chinese history, especially those at Tiananmen Square such as the May Fourth protests in 1919, the Red Guard rallies in the autumn of 1966, and the student protests in 1989; "The phrase *Tiananmen Guangchang* signifies a mighty authoritarian state power and *the people* [*renmin* 人民], that great homogenous mass [*qunti* 群體] without classes or individuality."[17] By terming the Opening Ceremonies as a kind of plaza art, Zhang Yimou is tapping into a legacy of not just a physical space, but trying to recuperate a

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[16] Zhang's choice of words reflects longstanding aims for his film work as well. Although the exact terms differ, as early as the 1983 "Cinematographers' Statement on the Film *One and Eight*" (co-written with Xiao Feng) Zhang discusses how the aesthetics of the film were designed to produce a "beauty of strength" (*li zhi mei*) through the contrast of colors, light, etc. This phrase was also employed by Lu Xun to describe the burgeoning woodcut art movement in the 1930s (see Chapter 3). See Zhang Yimou and Xiao Feng. "Yingpian *Yige he bage* sheying chanshu 影片《一個和八個》攝影闡述" (Cinematographers' Statement on the Film *One and Eight*). *Lun Zhang Yimou* 論張藝謀 (On Zhang Yimou). Beijing: Zhongguo dianying chubanshe, 1994. 92-99.

[17] Dai Jinhua 戴錦華. *Yinxing shuxie: 90 niandai Zhongguo wenhua yanjiu* 隱形書寫：90年代中國文化研究 (Invisible Writing: Research in Chinese Cultural Studies in the 1990s). Nanjing: Jiangsu renmin chubanshe, 1999. 261. English in Dai Jinhua, "Invisible Writing," Trans. Jingyuan Zhang. *Cinema and Desire*, 215.

technique of plaza art that draws on the *guangchang* as an imaginary, revolutionary stage inhabited by the crowd.

As Dai goes on to explain, however, since the mid-1990s the term *guangchang* has become ubiquitous in Chinese cities as, simply, a shopping center, thus displacing the sacred aura of revolution and instead partaking in "the spectacle of globalization" that transforms the revolutionary masses into a crowd of consumers.[18] Zhang Yimou's Opening Ceremonies likewise simultaneously draw on a legacy of revolution in its appropriation of the crowd image while engaging the global market, advertising an image of China to the world that signals a break from its revolutionary past, instead announcing that China is open for business. The homogeneity of the masses, no longer based on the elimination of class divisions, is rather presumed in the illusion of equality under the market economy.[19] Having been purged of its ideological vitality, the crowd in China's Olympics therefore serves as reminder of the loss of the utopian vision promised by Socialism. Ritual, in this sense, is an empty gesture, the "ritualization of utopia" that suggests, as Maurice Meisner puts it, "not the simple failure of revolution but rather a process of degeneration which seems inherent in its very success."[20] The 2008 Olympic

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[18] Dai Jinhua, *Yinxing shuxie,* 263. English in Dai Jinhua, "Invisible Writing," 217.

[19] Critics are fond of comparing Beijing's Olympic efforts with the 1936 Berlin Olympics in terms of both its geopolitical context and pervasive crowd formations (a comparison that gives legs to the ongoing juxtaposition of Zhang with Nazi filmmaker Leni Riefenstahl, who filmed the Berlin games for her 1938 documentary *Olympia*). A more apt parallel, particularly in terms of global spectacle and economic investment is the Los Angeles games of 1984, which redefined the Olympics as a global commodity. For more, see Tomlinson, Alan. "Olympic Values, Beijing's Olympic Games, and the Universal Market." *Owning the Olympics: Narratives of the New China*. Eds. Monroe E. Price and Daniel Dayan. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2008. 67-70.

[20] Meisner, Maurice. *Marxism, Maoism, and Utopianism: Eight Essays*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1982. 214. The authors of *Ritual and Its Consequences* make a similar point, writing, "the subjunctive world created by ritual is always doomed ultimately to fail – the ordered world of flawless repetition can never fully replace the broken world of experience. […] Ritual should be seen as operating in … 'the register of the tragic.'" Adam B. Seligman, et al, *Ritual and Its Consequences*, 30.

Games, referred to as the long-awaited opportunity for China to showcase its remarkable economic development and exhibit its openness to the world, from this perspective, is a finale of sorts.

Zhang's explanation of his use of "human wave tactics" in the Opening Ceremonies suggests not just a recognition the embodied power of such crowd forms, but also a measured ambivalence toward the function of the plaza. This equivocation, mindful of the passing of the once-immanent revolutionary utopia the crowd signals, is magnified by a repeated correlation Zhang locates between the fullness of the crowd and its absence. In the same interview quoted above, Zhang discusses the numbers of performers used in the Ceremonies and remarks that the logistics and uniformity required for such a performance involving so many will confound the Western viewer who cannot see the whole for the parts:

> I think when [Westerners] watch something like this, they do marvel at its technical proficiency, but I think they see it as a matter of 1+1. If they watch the North Korean *Arirang* (the latest *Arirang* has just happened), they would also marvel at its perfection in this sense.[21] It is people, so many people moving together in unison, but the Westerner doesn't see this. This is something they should have, not us in our ancient Eastern countries. In the end, if the Westerner again watches this technique he will see the human element; after he sees it as 1+1, the feeling of amplification will be produced, and this is truly the feeling of astonishment he should have. 我認為他們看,不僅是這麼技術多麼嘆為觀止,我認為他看到的是 1+1,如果他看朝鮮的阿裡郎,現在新版阿裡郎也出來了,他也是在這個意義上嘆為觀止。就是人,那麼多人的那種動作的整齊,但是他沒有看到這一個,這一個應該是他們有的,不是我們這個古老的東方國家高的。結果他又看到這個技術,然後又看到那個,我覺得他是看到 1+1 之後,就產生了一個放大感,他真的是應該有嘆為觀止的感覺。[22]

The figure of the crowd cannot be accounted for through the mere totaling of its sum; rather, it produces an expansive sense of wholeness and totality, embodied through the uniformity of movement (*dongzuo de zhengqi* 動作的整齊). The inability to understand

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[21] The Grand Mass Gymnastics and Artistic Performance Arirang, held annually from August until October in Pyongyang, celebrates the birthday of DPRK founder Kim Il-sung. The 2007 Arirang was recognized by Guinness World Records as the "Largest Gymnastics Display" with more than 100,000 performers.

[22] Zhang Ying and Xia Chen, "Zhang Yimou jiemi kaimushi," A6.

that Zhang assigns to his imagined Western observer recalls a similar sentiment expressed by Chairman Mao in 1964 when, speaking to a American journalist, he asked rhetorically, "Is Communism only the piling of brick on brick? Is there no work to be done with man?"[23] Both Zhang and Mao perceive inadequacy in the simple arithmetical aggregation of individuals to represent the whole, and depend instead on the affective sensation of the sublime produced through spectacle, a fusion of political ritual and aesthetic possibility. The "feeling of amplification" (*yige fangdagan* 一個放大感) he aims for is akin in this way to what Ban Wang calls the "overwhelming explosion of sensory stimulus" in his discussion of the Cultural Revolution's rhetorical creation of "a sea of red."[24] Impossible to achieve through mere accounting, the sense of the humanity that underlies the ritual staging of the crowd is, for Zhang, a feeling conditioned in red culture and revolutionary history.

The mathematical quandary Zhang Yimou identifies above underscores one of the fundamental paradoxes of crowd imagination. According to Arjun Appadurai, the idea of the masses is represented numerically by the number zero "because it is the key to converting integers into numbers in the hundreds, the thousands, the millions."[25] Using "0" to break free of the limits of seeing the crowd as merely a matter of "1+1" manifests the metonymic potential of the crowd to point toward the totalized masses, but also

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[23] From an interview with American journalist Anna Louise Strong on January 17, 1964. See Strong, Tracy B. and Helene Keyssar. "Anna Louise Strong: Three Interviews with Chairman Mao Zedong." *China Quarterly* 103 (September 1985). 502. The first part of this quote is also used as the epigraph to Maurice Meisner's book, *Marxism, Maoism, and Utopianism*.

[24] Ban Wang, *The Sublime Figure of History*, 198.

[25] Appadurai, Arjun. *Fear of Small Numbers: An Essay on the Geography of Anger*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2006. 59-60.

produces a parallel vision of emptiness alongside it. Mao's famous assertion that one of the Chinese masses' most revolutionary features are that they are "poor and blank" (*yiqiong erbai* 一窮二白) also realizes this special capacity for the simultaneous expression of exponential growth and a hollow void.[26] In this sense, the operation of the crowd image resembles that of a Derridean supplement, producing both "the *fullest measure* of presence" which nonetheless "produces no relief, its place is assigned in the structure by the mark of emptiness."[27] In Zhang's Opening Ceremonies, the "mark of emptiness" is the very source of the crowd's ideological and imagistic authority, the figure of Mao. A couple of oblique references notwithstanding, Mao's invisibility in the 2008 Beijing Olympics Opening Ceremonies is pronounced. The revolutionary plentitude once promised by the crowd invokes the specter of the Chairman, but by doing so also reenacts his erasure from the narrative of China's Olympic dream.

Mao's pronounced absence in the Opening Ceremonies is underscored by a couple of oblique references to him. In his detailed explication of the event, Geremie Barmé observes one such allusion to the man whose supreme presence presides over just this kind of venerating crowd in much of the art produced in China over the past six decades.[28] The impressionistic landscape painting traced onto the giant LED scroll evokes one of the canonical paintings of the Maoist era, *How Splendid the Rivers and*

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[26] Mao Tsetung (Mao Zedong). *Quotations from Chairman Mao Tsetung*. Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1966. 36. Chinese in *Mao zhuxi yulü* 毛主席語錄. Beijing: Zhongguo renmin jiefangjun zongzhengzhibu, 1966. 33. This idea is also discussed in Meisner, Maurice. *Mao Zedong: A Political and Intellectual Portrait*. Malden: Polity Press, 2007. 148-149.

[27] Derrida, Jacques. *Of Grammatology*. Trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997. 144-145.

[28] Geremie R. Barmé, "China's Flat Earth," 74-76.

Mountains (Jiangshan ruci jiao 江山如此多嬌; the title is taken from a line in Mao's well-known 1936 poem "Snow" [*Xue* 雪]).[29] In the 1959 painting, the prominence of rising red sun of Mao in the upper right is matched by the monumentality of the landscape, which indicates not only the vastness of nature, but the masses themselves in the "blank" spaces of the clouds and mountains. The dynamic relation between Mao and the crowd image, a correlation made explicit in countless paintings and posters of the Maoist era, works as an ideological projection: the irreducible image of Mao becomes a metonymical representation of the unseen masses as a projection of future revolutionary desire and embodiment of the collective that he would create, and vice versa. The absence of Mao in the Opening Ceremonies therefore suggests something spectral: despite the careful erasure of his traces, the crowd image itself projects his invisible persistence.

Without Mao's ruddy visage to catalyze the crowd into being, what can be proffered as the organizing of the post-revolutionary masses? The Opening Ceremonies' celebration of the "Four Great Inventions," together with the vision of the future China's technological innovation, comprise a powerful and appealing narrative of Chinese culture that stresses invention, ingenuity, and modernity. The crowd image, no longer mobilized to wage ideological warfare, becomes instead a vehicle of technological progress in a

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[29] Painters Fu Baoshi 傅抱石 and Guan Shanyue 關山月 were commissioned to paint the enormous work as part of the 1958 campaign that saw the development of Tiananmen Square, including the Great Hall of the People, where this work hangs. For more information on this work, see Andrews, Julia F. *Painters and Politics in the People's Republic of China, 1949-1979*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994. 227-236. Landscape painters were a frequent target of criticism during the Maoist era and justified their work by claiming a correspondence between the vast landscape and the sublime idea of the masses. Jiang Qing, for one, expressed disapproval of *How Splendid the Rivers and Mountains* because it contained no evidence of man. See Ellen Johnston Laing, *The Winking Owl,* 77.

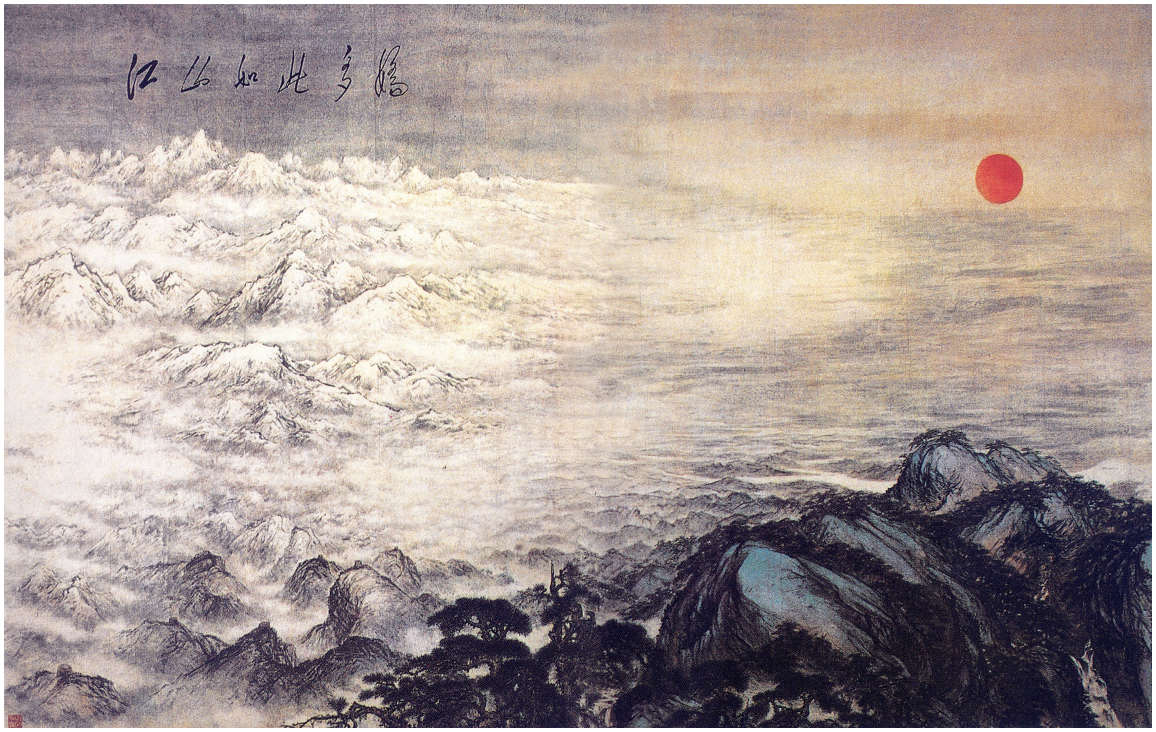

Fig. 4.3 Fu Baoshi 傅抱石 and Guan Shanyue 關山月, *How Splendid the Rivers and Mountains* (Jiangshan ruci jiao 江山如此多嬌, 1959).

Fig. 4.4 The landscape painting created by performers during the 2008 Olympics Opening Ceremonies in Beijing. In the second half of the show, a smiley-face was added to the sun in the upper right corner.

globalized, international future.[30] Tech is the new *telos*. Though the discourse of "technological utopianism" has a long history in Chinese cultural production,[31] the emphasis on its *collective* realization in the 2008 Opening Ceremonies finds its most direct visual authority in the modernization propaganda of the Maoist era, when technological advancement and innovation was constantly juxtaposed with the themes of socialist revolution.[32] The visually fantastic link between industrialization and collectivity that began with the Great Leap Forward campaign of the late 1950s remained a prominent theme of posters and political films of the following two decades. The impossible excess that characterizes the crowd-like figure of multiplicity is summoned in exhibitions of successful production and reproduction; technological achievement, crop yield, manufacturing bounty, and other fantastic signifiers of utopian modernization are pictured necessarily as collective triumph. The means of propaganda take the explosive growth of the crowd as its model; the techniques (and messages) of mass-reproduction during the Maoist era, marked with "detachability and infinite repeatability," in Rey Chow's words, are shared and propagated in the medium of the crowd.[33]

Crowd, Ritual, and History: *Hero* (2002) and *Curse of the Golden Flower* (2006)

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[30] See my discussion of Siegfried Kracauer's 1927 essay "The Mass Ornament" in Chapter Three.

[31] See for example, Ming, Feng-ying. "Baoyu in Wonderland: Technological Utopia in the Early Modern Chinese Science Fiction Novel." *China in a Polycentric World: Essays in Chinese Comparative Literature*. Ed. Yingjin Zhang. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998. 152-172.

[32] For an examination of Soviet Russian, Eastern European, and North Korean rhetoric of technology, see Josephson, Paul R. *Would Trotsky Wear a Bluetooth? Technological Utopianism under Socialism, 1917-1989*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010.

[33] Rey Chow, *Primitive Passions*, 34.

Contextualizing the connections between the crowd image, ritual, and technology that underpin the mythic narrative of the 2008 Opening Ceremonies with his depictions of epic "histories" in the films *Hero* and *Curse of the Golden Flower* further complicate the picture of how the crowd is figured in Zhang's cinematic vision.[34] In each of these examples, the crowd serves a highly ritualistic and militaristically technological function, existing, ostensibly, as a subordinate player in the more qualified drama between the main actors (roles unfailingly filled by the biggest stars in contemporary Chinese film). Though the role of the crowd in these examples can be described as merely ornamental, Zhang's maximalist techniques of depicting the crowd interrogates the problematic relationship between leaders and masses, a dilemma with immediate ramifications on how history is written and, perhaps more significantly, expunged. In this sense, history-making is itself caught up in "human wave tactics," an aesthetic spectacle masking the violence and sacrifice that contribute to its formation.

Hero weaves together several narrative threads told in flashback that relate an elaborate endeavor to assassinate Ying Zheng 嬴政 (who would become the First Emperor, Qin Shihuang 秦始皇, played by Chen Daoming 陳道明). As layers of narrative, related in multiple and competing interpretations (and color schemes), propel the assassin Nameless' (Jet Li [Li Lianjie] 李連杰) gradually closer to his target, the characterization of the First Emperor grows more sympathetic, transforming the cruel tyrant of the Chinese popular imagination into a compassionate, strong, and solitary

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[34] *Hero* depicts the specific historical moment of the unification of the Warring States in the third century BCE. *Curse of the Golden Flower* is less historically certain; the U.S. DVD release by Sony Pictures Classics begins by spelling out "928 AD, China, Tang Dynasty" just below the title, a referent missing in the Chinese release. Despite the incorrect pairing of year with dynasty and numerous historical anomalies in the film, interviews suggest that the story may be assumed to take place in the late Tang.

figure.[35] Much like the reciprocity between the revolutionary crowd and Chairman Mao, the crowd formations of soldiers and officials to Ying Zheng are a near constant accessory to absolute authority and imperial ceremony. However, what becomes clear by the end of the film is how the ornament of the crowd image isolates the First Emperor, and what's more, forecloses any other narrative possibilities (particularly the ritual execution of Nameless at the end of the film). Zhang not only demonstrates the Emperor's own impotence to break free of the ritual trappings that he has created for himself, but also highlights historical erasure as a consequence of the same resolute will to unify China that the film celebrates on the surface.

Fig. 4.5 The background of a promotional poster for Zhang's 2002 film *Hero* ironically shows Ying Zheng (top) in semi-transparent, ghostly form, while the would-be assassins and the massive army below remain solid.

Although Zhang consistently denies that any of his films are intended to be political in nature, there is a suggestive connection between his sympathetic depiction of the Qin Emperor and Mao's own reappraisal of the First Emperor. While his historical

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[35] Zhang's fascination with Qin Shihuang is not limited to *Hero*. Zhang's collaboration with the composer Tan Dun 譚盾 (who wrote the score for *Hero*) in the opera *The First Emperor* premiered in New York in late 2006. Like the Opening Ceremonies Zhang would direct a less than two years later, the production was praised highly for its spectacular set design (including a near-constant chorus of hundreds), costuming, and choreography. For a critical reading of Zhang's multiple depictions of Qin Shihuang's quest for immortality from a different perspective, see Rojas, Carlos. *The Great Wall: A Cultural History*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010. 60-66. Also see Wang, Yiyan. "Ruthless Tyrant or Compassionate Hero: Chinese Popular Nationalism and the Myth of State Origins." *Global Chinese Cinema: The Culture and Politics of* Hero. Ed. Gary D. Rawnsley and Ming-Yeh T. Rawnsley. New York: Routledge, 2010. 43-52.

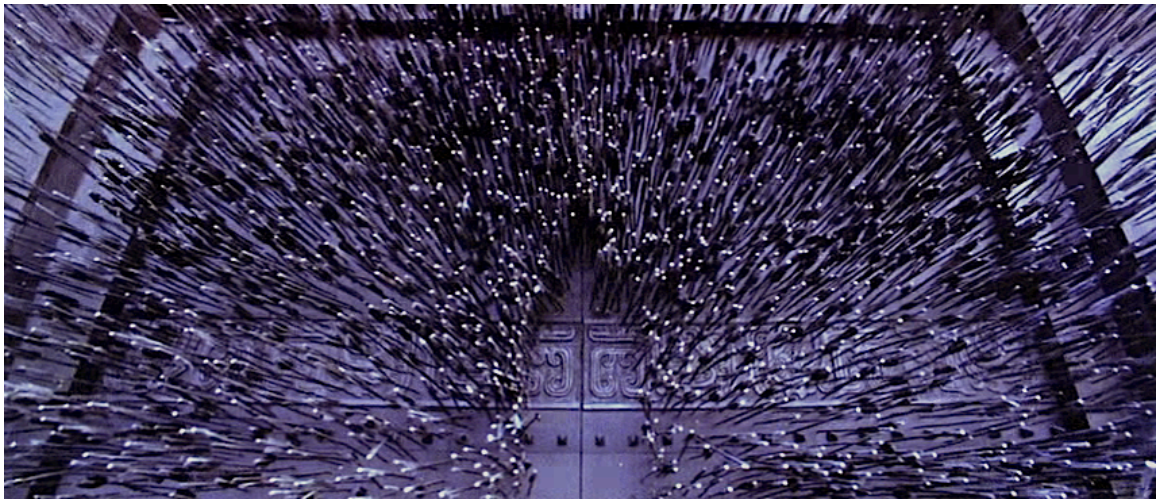

Fig. 4.6 At the end of *Hero*, the empty space in the shape of Nameless' body made by the barrage of arrows further emphasizes the visual dialectical between the plentitude of the crowd and the image of absence it produces.

significance was never in doubt, Qin Shihuang was for centuries reviled as a ruthless tyrant who slaughtered scholars and burned books in pursuit of monomaniacal aims. In the first decades of the People's Republic, however, the Emperor was gradually exonerated of his excesses, even gaining measured praise from Chairman Mao.[36] After it was discovered that Vice-Chairman Lin Biao 林彪, in his outline for a failed *coup d'état*, had vilified Mao as "a contemporary Qin Shihuang" (*dangdai de Qin Shihuang* 當代的秦始皇), a major mass campaign was launched in 1972 to posthumously criticize Lin, along with Confucius. Mao's association with the First Emperor was embraced, and numerous articles, along with a best-selling biography, appeared, praising Qin Shihuang in

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[36] In a 1958 speech Mao used the First Emperor as a positive example of "emphasizing the present while slighting the past" (*houjin bogu* 厚今薄古). After being reminded by Vice-Chairman Lin Biao of the Emperor's infamous crimes of "burning books and burying Confucians alive" (*fenshu kangru* 焚書坑儒), Mao notes, "What did he amount to? He only buried alive 460 scholars, while we buried 46,000. In our suppression of the counter-revolutionaries, did we not kill some counter-revolutionary intellectuals? 秦始皇算甚麼？他只坑了四百六十個儒，我們坑四萬六千個儒。我鎮反，還沒有殺掉一些反革命的知識分子嗎？" Quoted in Li Yu-ning's introduction to *The First Emperor of China*. Ed. Li Yu-ning. White Plains: International Arts and Sciences Press, 1975. xlix-l. Text of original speech in "Zai bada erci huiyi shang de jianghua 在八大二次會議上的講話" (Speech at the Second Plenum of the Eighth Central Committee). *Mao Zedong sixiang wansui!* (Long live Mao Zedong thought!), Vol. 2. Hong Kong: Yishan shuwu, 1967-1969. 195. Mao performs exactly the same arithmetical flourish with the integer "0" as Appadurai above, and in doing so summons the image of the revolutionary crowd's double, the figurative "heap of the dead." See Chapter Two of this dissertation, and Elias Canetti, *Crowds and Power*, 67-73.

historical materialist terms as a progressive ruler.[37] One such article exalts the First Emperor's decree to officially designate the common people as *qianshou* 黔首, literally "the black-headed," a nomenclatural shift that, according to the author, acknowledges their status as "the principal force of the war of unification" (*tongyi zhanzheng de zhuli* 統一戰爭的主力).[38] Zhang's film *Hero,* nearly three decades after Mao's promotion of the First Emperor, continues the ongoing process of historical revision, by paying special attention to the figure of the crowd image and the way in both manifests the singular hegemon, while endowing the massed soldiers with his titanic will that will unify the disparate kingdoms into national wholeness. This kind of sublime spectacle of immanence suggests, therefore, not only a modern legacy of crowds Zhang re-mystifies into, the past, but also queries the practice of ritual itself, and in particular the practice of ritual that serves as a proxy for writing history.

Curse of the Golden Flower also emphasizes the constructedness of the historical narrative, and the violence and erasure underlying the accumulation of political power, a process that holds particular resonance in the catastrophic power struggles that engulfed China during the Cultural Revolution. My reading of the film therefore focuses instead Zhang's deft embrace of CGI (computer-generated imagery) in its production. At the climax of *Curse*, an attempted overthrow of the Emperor (Chow Yun-fat [Zhou Runfa] 周

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[37] For a detailed account of the reinterpretation of Qin Shihuang during the "Criticize Lin, Criticize Confucius" campaign (*pi Lin pi Kong yundong* 批林批孔運動), see Wang Gungwu. "'Burning Books and Burying Scholars': Some Recent Interpretations Concerning Ch'in Shih-huang." *Papers on Far Eastern History* 9 (March 1974). 137-186.

[38] Shih Lun. "On the "Black-Headed People." *The First Emperor*, 250-251. Chinese in Shi Lun 石侖. "Lun 'qianshou' 论'黔首'" *Hongqi* 紅旗 (Red Flag) 1974.10. 67. According to the *Shiji* 史記, Qin Shihuang's decree was handed down in the 26th year of his reign (221 BCE). See Sima Qian, *Records of the Grand Historian: Qin Dynasty*. Trans. Burton Watson. Hong Kong: Renditions / Columbia University Press, 1993. 44.

Fig. 4.7 In the 2006 film *Curse of the Golden Flower*, an attempted overthrow of Emperor fails to delay the spectacle of the celebration of the Chrysanthemum festival.

潤發), orchestrated by the Empress (Gong Li 鞏俐) and led by her son, Prince Jai (Jay Chou [Zhou Jielun 周杰倫]), unleashes hundreds of thousands of soldiers on the palace courtyard, where they battle an equally massive army whose advantage in ingenious weaponry ensures the insurgency's swift and brutal suppression. Zhang Yimou's proclivity for technological exhibition in the spectacular battle scenes works doubly, both through the extra-diegetic CGI effects that multiply the expanse of the crowd, and through the imaginative military hardware the soldiers deploy.

The way that Zhang connects crowds and the technology that mobilizes them underscores the original, militaristic sense of the phrase "human wave tactics," rendering the military crowd as a cinematic effect whose means of visibility condition its spectacular extermination at the film's resolution.[39] Summoning these "digital multitudes," for Zhang, both indulges his interest in "plaza art" while revealing the

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[39] One of the key promotional points was the extravagant reality of these war crowds. In television spots and interviews before the film's 2006 release, Zhang and others repeatedly divulged the fact that more than 20,000 extras were used in the climactic battle scenes. Like in the Opening Ceremonies, these crowds were assembled with in cooperation with the PLA. See Yu Deshu 喻得術. "Dianying dachangmian qianjunwanma 'shang bu qi' 電影大場面千軍萬馬'傷不起'" ('Invincible' Crowds in Huge Film Scenes). *Fazhi wanbao* 法制晚報 18 November 2011. http://www.fawan.com/Article/yl/jd/2011/11/18/124530136862.html. Accessed 27 August 2012.

Fig. 4.8 Jay Chou leads the "digital multitude" into battle in the *Curse of the Golden Flower*.

violence and mass death underscoring state ritual in the ceremonial spectacular of the Chrysanthemum Festival that ends the film. Such massive casualty fails to deter the ceremony as hundreds of palace workers methodically remove the corpses and replace them with arranged flowers in pots.

Film critic Sek Kei 石琪 writes in a brief review of *Curse of the Golden Flower* that only someone who had experienced the Cultural Revolution could have made such a film of such excessive proportions, and finds irony in the film's ending in which all traces of the bloody, failed coup have been whitewashed with an image of peace and prosperity.[40] Though these films are set in the ancient past, their concerns with historical erasure, as Sek suggests, are much more contemporary. The constant rewriting of revolutionary history in China during the Maoist years, including rectification, purges, and revisions, found legitimation in the name of "the mass line," even while the traces of the political machinations driving the historical narrative were distorted, forgotten, and

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[40] Sek Kei 石琪. "Mancheng jindai huangjinjia guguai《滿城盡帶黃金甲》古怪" (The Bizarre *Curse of the Golden Flower*). *Mingpao* 明報 27 December 2006. http://ol.mingpao.com/cfm/star5.cfm?File=20061227/saa02/mee1.txt. Accessed 27 August 2012.

Fig. 4.9-10 The crowd figures prominently in images of technological development and prodigious production, such as *A Display of Fireworks and Lanterns* (Huoshuyinhua buyetian 火樹銀花不夜天; unknown artist, n.d.) and *Pull Together and Unite Our Efforts* (Qixin xieli 齊心協力; Zhang Yanhai 張衍海, 1974) (Wang Mingxian and Yan Shanchun, (*Xin Zhongguo meishu tushi, 1966-1976*, 187 [left] and 109 [right].).

Fig. 4.11 *Take Great Strides in Studying Daqing, Make New Contributions in the Struggle to Support Agriculture* (Maikai dabu xue daqing, zhinong zhengzuo xingongxian 邁開大步學大慶，支農爭作新貢獻, Mo Shuzi 莫樹滋, 1977) (*Chinese Propaganda Posters*, 190.).

excised. Also, as noted above, the campaign of industrial modernization in the Maoist era was not only embarked upon with tremendous mass mobilization, but was envisioned in remarkably similar visual terms as the revolutionary masses, connecting the image of the crowd to the politics of technological reproduction. While abundance symbolized the nation's drive to modernize — and collectivize — it simultaneously evokes the massive casualty brought by this technological ambition, reducing that same multiplicity to silence and invisibility.[41] Much more than an expression of the ruler's might, the crowd image, oscillating between visual plentitude and historical erasure, highlights the violence, sacrifice, and ghostly void that accompanies these power struggles.

Deconstruction of the Red Crowd: *One and Eight* (1983) and *The Big Parade* (1986)

Zhang Yimou's historical epics of the first decade of the twenty-first century seem far removed from his initial forays in cinema as part of the Fifth Generation of filmmakers in the 1980s. In the films *One and Eight*, *Yellow Earth* (Huang tudi 黃土地) (dir. Chen Kaige, 1984) and *The Big Parade*, Zhang's cinematographic work powerfully re-visualizes of the foundations of the historical narrative of revolution and confronts the mythic image of the cultural origins of collectivist ideology in China. While the plots of these films overlap significantly with the filmic narrative of national liberation present in

[41] Frank Dikötter's recently published *Mao's Great Famine*, for example, brings new research to light on the horrifying effects of the Great Leap Forward. Also see Paul R. Josephson, *Would Trotsky Wear a Bluetooth?*, 6-7.

most PRC cinema after 1949,[42] Zhang's cinematographic work visually interrogates a sacred totem of Party ideology, the constitution and sublimation of the crowd.

For the Fifth Generation filmmakers, forging a new aesthetics for Chinese film meant not only challenging the master narrative of revolutionary Maoist ideology, but also dismantling of the visual dynamic of the crowd image. In response to the radical profusion of crowds and crowd images of the Cultural Revolution, these fifth generation films hailed both a vigorous renewal of the engagement with individuality and nature as well as a deconstruction of the revolutionary myth. A closer look at the visual and cinematographic style developed in these works, however, also exhibits a persistent fascination with the crowd image. Director Chen Kaige remarked of the drum dance scene in his 1984 film *Yellow Earth* that "the unified way people dress up and dance is a thing all in itself, too."[43] How the Fifth Generation and their films picture this "thing all in itself" in the wake of the Cultural Revolution thus manifests the crowd as an uncanny, haunting compulsion, a hollow gesture toward the utopia it once promised.

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[42] Director Zhang Junzhao stated in a 1984 interview that the main thrust of the film is "to grasp the strength of those in war — the strength of Communists, the strength of the masses across all social strata. It is precisely these disparate, isolated elements of power that the CCP brought together in strength and was able to triumph over Japanese imperialism and set the nation on a course of continuous development. 我們要抓戰爭中的人的力度——共產黨的力度，社會各階層人民群眾的力度。正是中國共產黨把這些分散的、孤立的分力匯成了一個巨大的合力，才戰勝了日本帝國主義，並推動我們民族的歷史不斷向前發展。" See the interview with Luo Xueying 罗雪莹. *Huiwang chunzhen niandai: Zhongguo zhuming dianying daoyan fangtanlu* 回望纯真年代：中国著名电影导演访谈录 (Looking Back on a Sincere Age: Interviews with Famous Chinese Film Directors). Beijing: Xueyuan chubanshe, 2008. 121.

[43] See Semsel, George S. "Interviews: Chen Kaige and Zhang Yimou, Fifth Generation Director and Cinematographer." *Chinese Film: The State of Art in the People's Republic*. Ed. George Semsel. New York: Praeger Publishers, 1987. 139-140. Chen also characterizes the drum dance scene as an expression of "the consciousness of power in taking control over their own destiny." Zhang echoes this sentiment, and notes how, in order to prevent the camera movements from becoming too disorienting and having "subjective flavor" (*zhuguan secai* 主观色彩) includes a panning shot of the bystanders watching the spectacle, hands tucked into their sleeves. "If they could take control over their own destiny, they could erupt with a strength that could move mountains and fill the sea. 他們一旦掌握了自己的命運，就會迸發出移山填海的力量。" See Zhang Yimou. "Wo pai *Huang tudi* 我拍《黃土地》" (I Shot *Yellow Earth*). Interview with Xiao Luo 小罗. *Huashuo* Huang tudi 話説《黃土地》(Telling the Story of *Yellow Earth*). Beijing: Zhongguo dianying chubanshe, 1986. 287. Ni Zhen credits Zhang with the idea for the drum dance scene in Yellow Earth; see Ni Zhen, *Memoirs from the Beijing Film Academy*, 180-181.

One and Eight was granted limited public released on October 8, 1984, following an almost year-long process of re-editing to meet the requirements for certification from the Film Bureau.[44] Though the film has never gained the recognition of the international breakout *Yellow Earth*, released just a couple of months later, it prefigures that film and other Fifth Generation works in both style and theme. Set in 1941 during the War of Resistance to Japan in the desolate plains of central Hebei province, *One and Eight* concerns a group of nine prisoners being held for various crimes by the Eighth Route Army. The titular "one" is Wang Jin (Chen Daoming), an officer of the army that, after being separated from his unit, is falsely accused of treason. Wang is differentiated from the motley "eight," comprised of bandits, deserters, an informant, and a well-poisoner, from the beginning, both by the camera's treatment of him and the other characters' recognition of his principled behavior. Zhang (with Xiao Feng) notes in the "Cinematographers' Statement" that

> Comparing [the '1' and the '8']in either numerical terms or in terms of 'substance', they are opposites; but when this individual's words and actions shock, influence, and resonate among the others, through a series of events we get a sense of the Communist's fearless spirit made manifest by his resolute faith, as well as the integrity that comes from his devotion to the cause. 個和八個，在數量上的比位和在'質'的比較上卻是相反的，當這一個人的言行震動、影響並反饋與其他人時，從發生的一系列事件中，我們感受到了共產黨人那種堅定信仰而迸發的無畏精神和為事業而獻身的情操。[45]

By the end of the film, Wang's righteous comportment and unfailing devotion to Communist Party principles has convinced the others to give up their selfish ways and fight on behalf of their nation against the Japanese. Communist principle serves as the

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[44] Paul Clark, *Reinventing China*, 79. For a list of changes made to the film, see Luo Xueying, *Huiwang chunzhen niandai*, 134-137.

[45] Zhang Yimou and Xiao Feng, "Yingpian *Yige he bage* sheying chanshu," 92.

interface through which the disparate integers can, at least temporarily, achieve common purpose.

The film's storyline of how a disparate group can achieve a sense of belonging, camaraderie, and loyalty to the nation may sound familiar in the socialist realist tradition, and certainly hues to the demands of ideological correctness. However, in contrast to the war films of the 1950 and 1960s, in which the shining flawlessness of the Eighth Route Army heroes strikes fear into sickly and evil foreigners or traitors, this ragtag bunch finds redemption in spite of their nefarious backgrounds. After coming across the massacre of a small village, the prisoners undergo a transformation, giving up their selfish pursuits and beginning to understand the need for collective action as a response to such mass atrocity (this scene was suggested by Zhang and used around 200 extras to play corpses).[46] The film boldly bestows the possibility of "redness" on characters previously "unpresentable" and precluded from attaining such distinction.[47] In terms of its formal aesthetics, as well, *One and Eight* stands out compared to the practice of making war films of the Maoist era; Dai Jinhua notes how the variety of technical stylizations and unorthodox camera work complete "the defamiliarization of historical myth" regarding the founding of the nation.[48] Even the film's title poses a mathematical query without a definite sum and instead uses discreet fragments that suggest the possibility of adding up to something, but does not assume a latent unity of the parts in a cohesive whole.

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[46] Ni Zhen, *Memoirs from the Beijing Film Academy*, 166-167.

[47] "Unpresentable" is Ma Ning's term to describe these characters in "Notes on the New Filmmakers, " *Chinese Film*, 73-77.

[48] Dai Jinhua, "Severed Bridge," *Cinema and Desire*, 36.

Most striking about the film's depiction of the crowd and process of formation is found in its aesthetics of visualizing the collective. The opening sequence of the film collects historical photos of the war while an authoritative voice-over (reminiscent in tenor of the narrator of 1964's propaganda film *The East Is Red*) describes the national struggle against the Japanese imperialists, highlighting the contributions of the Communist Party. Unlike a conventional newsreel, however, the sequence of photos does not follow a regular pattern or timings; when the montage sequence connects the historical background to the film's plot, we see a slow pan across a still photo of the nine prisoners. Silhouetted against a blue background, each of the criminals faces a different direction, seemingly unconnected in any way to the other members of the group (save for the rope that ties them together). This panning shot is followed by the rapid juxtaposition of extreme close-ups of the prisoners faces, spliced together in seeming random fashion. The incongruity of the narration, told in the standard and familiar voice of the Party, with the modernist visual montage that accompanies it sets up a remarkable contradiction between the master narrative of history and a visual sense of fragmentation and shock.

Modernist and avant-garde film techniques offer a different perspective on the crowd than the uniform image of the heroic masses that flourished in the Cultural Revolution. Extreme close-ups of faces and torsos, glimpses of body parts in shafts of light surrounded by darkness, and alternation between deep and shallow focus to contrast faces in the foreground and background all serve to fragment the typically homogenous and unified crowd image, demystifies the idea of totality. What Zhang Yimou's cinematographic style here suggests is that such a unity is constructed, and that the idea

Fig. 4.12-13 The montage sequence that opens the 1983 film *One and Eight* fractures the composition of the crowd.

of the masses is at best a cinematic projection. The film ends with a long shot of Wang Jin carrying the wounded section chief on his back across the flat, desolate landscape dominated in the frame by the bleak, washed-out sky (a technique Zhang would repeat to great effect in *Yellow Earth*). As the two makes their way into the distance, their bodies merge together to form a somewhat grotesque amalgamation of humanity whose fusion is no more than a visual trick, a mirage captured on film.[49]

The visual problem of the crowd is made even starker in the 1986 film *The Big Parade*. *The Big Parade* was the second collaboration between director Chen Kaige, cinematographer Zhang Yimou, and art director He Qun 何群 following the remarkable success of *Yellow Earth*. Filmed over a summer in Hubei Province in sweltering heat, the film was designed to commemorate the 1984 National Day parade through Tiananmen Square that marked the thirty-fifth anniversary of the founding of the PRC. It follows a division of servicemen enduring the physically and mentally grueling training required to participate in the parade. On the training ground, the collectivity and uniformity of their actions are instilled into the soldiers, systemizing every aspect of the group from their posture to the height of each of their steps. Zhang's cinematography in *The Big Parade* deconstructs both the crowd as a mass unit and the ritual of its formation. Slow pans across assembled torsos, arms and legs as doctors taking careful stock of each soldier's height, shoulder width, and relative position of their knees reveal some of the visual tricks involved in the Party's visual myth of crowd aesthetics. The intensity of the

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[49] Ma Ning notes that the out-of-focus figures form the shape of a tripod, which he reads as *ren* 人, or person. Though I appreciate how this visualization dovetails with his humanist interpretation of the film, the three-legged nature of a tripod implies much more heavily, I think, the character *zhong* 眾, or crowd. See Ma Ning, "Notes on the New Filmmakers," *Chinese Film*, 77.

Fig. 4.14-15 (Top) The discovery of a massacred village unifies the gazes of prisoners and soldiers alike. (Bottom) The closing shot of *One and Eight*.

discipline drilled into the soldiers, which Zhang shoots in a way that Eugene Wang calls a "formalizing impulse toward bodiless geometry,"[50] produces the impression of a singular entity, emphasized by the repeated use of long shots and overexposed takes that merge bodies together in the shimmering heat waves rising from the tarmac.

Over the course of the film, the soldiers, originally chosen on the basis of their physical similarities and visual cohesiveness, are gradually differentiated through characterization. Each struggles with their own personal tribulations (as well as sharing voice-over narration duties), and the strict training regiment taxes them physically and emotionally, as the visual tension implicit in their individuality and occasional isolation in the barracks contrasts with the highly regulated scenes of the training ground. Placing the characters' internal psyches at stake effectively breaks down the unified crowd into its individual components; as Yingjin Zhang puts it, "performing in state-sponsored events inevitably fragments the unified subjectivity (people as 'pedagogic object' — the nation-people)."[51] Near the end of the film, the squad leader Li Weicheng (played by Wang Xueqi 王學圻, who also starred as the Communist soldier in *Yellow Earth*) gives a moving speech highlighting both the futility and nobility of their task; after walking nearly ten thousand kilometers in preparation for just ninety-six steps before the rostrum at Tiananmen Square, Li asks, "Is this not a Long March?" evoking the crucial event in Chinese Communist historical mythology before he concludes by reciting a line from the

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[50] Wang, Eugene. "Film and Contemporary Chinese Art: Mediums and Remediation." *The Oxford Handbook of Chinese Cinemas*. Eds. Carlos Rojas and Eileen Cheng-yin Chow. New York: Oxford University Press, forthcoming.

[51] Zhang, Yingjin. *Screening China: Critical Interventions, Cinematic Reconfigurations, and the Transnational Imaginary in Contemporary Chinese Cinema*. Ann Arbor: Center for Chinese Studies, 2002. 173.

Fig. 4.16 A long shot of the soldiers in training on hot tarmac produces a homogenous mass in *The Big Parade*.

national anthem, "March of the Volunteers" (*Yiyong junjin xingqu* 義勇軍進行曲): "Let our flesh and blood forge our new Great Wall!" Each of these statements not only appeal to a revolutionary genealogy (another implicit allusion to the crowd), but also presents a problem of visualization of how the collective whole can be pictured and realized.

The latter image is particularly resonant in Chinese revolutionary film culture, as it recalls the leftist classic in which the song first appeared, Xu Xingzhi's 許幸之 1935 film *Children of Troubled Times* (Fengyun er nü 風雲兒女). That film concludes with "March of the Volunteers," as its protagonists take up arms and join the masses in song as they march against the invading Japanese. The marching sequence dialectically builds the masses up through a montage of close-ups on faces, marching feet, crude weapons like shovels and pickaxes, creating through cinematic effect a sense of unity in their rousing movements and singing. The film ends as the group marches forward to unknown ends, galvanized in spirit and ready to sacrifice their lives to to the national

cause. The filmic allusion to *Children of Troubled Times* with the song's appearance at the conclusion of *The Big Parade*, like the lyrical reference from the squad leaders's speech, strengthens the film's ideological content and revolutionary genealogy. However, what seems at first to be standard, newsreel-like coverage of the marching units at the 1984 National Day Parade playing "March of the Volunteers" as they pass in front of rostrum takes a more contemplative turn during the final minute or so. The rousing march, accompanied by sounds of footsteps in lockstep, segues into a more somber, nostalgic melody while various military units pass in slow motion. These plaintive shots, filmed in a highly ritualistic manner and edited together through slow fades, are protracted in a way that emphasizes the overwrought ideological formality of their action, as well as the ephemeral nature of such rituals.

Like *One and Eight*, the release of *The Big Parade* was delayed by more than a year due to disagreements with the Film Bureau. Director Chen Kaige's original intention was to end not with the parade, but with a series of shots of a deserted Tiananmen Square. The bureau's objection to the overly ambivalent connotations of this image of an empty Tiananmen, and its insistence that the ending instead include footage from the parade demonstrates the bureau's apprehension at the crowd's erasure. Wu Hung recalls how the pivotal 1949 decision to locate the government in Tiananmen Square found justification in Friedrich Engels' notion of "the zero point," as "the point on which they are all dependent, to which they are all related, and by which they are all determined."[52] Recalling my discussion of Zhang Yimou's remarks on "plaza art" above,

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[52] Friedrich Engels quoted in Wu Hung. *Remaking Beijing: Tiananmen Square and the Creation of a Political Space*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005. 8.

Fig. 4.17-19 (Top) A young soldier has trouble reconciling his individual desire with that of the crowd. (Middle) Slow-motion footage of the 1984 National Day Parade at the end of *The Big Parade*. (Bottom) The final shot of *The Big Parade*.

we can see how in *The Big Parade*, filmmakers were already exploring the ghostly dimensions of the crowd, either in their absence or as a cinematic effect of ritualization.

The 1984 National Day Parade was the largest official mass demonstration in Tiananmen Square since the Red Guard rallies in the summer and autumn of 1966.[53] At the time, the issue of how China would reconcile its market-oriented reforms and its revolutionary history was an unresolved question. By the time of the next National Day Parade in 1999, the spectacle of nationalism would become so carefully circumscribed an event that Beijing's residents were told to stay home and watch it on television.[54] For the 60th anniversary celebration in 2009, much of the creative team that executed the Olympic Opening Ceremonies a year previous reconvened to design the ritual spectacular that, Barmé notes, "are primarily produced for a TV audience." The mediatization of the crowd image makes clear Haiyan Lee's observation that the subject of representation in these parades, "the people," are to recognize themselves as "the absent signified."[55] Juxtaposing the films *The Big Parade* with the 2008 Olympics and the 2009 National Day festivities, we can see indications of how Zhang's sense of the crowd image, even its post-Cultural Revolution cinematographic deconstruction, is mediated through the cinematic apparatus.

The ambivalent final shot of *The Big Parade* of an de-individualized, silhouetted shot of a soldier's head facing the red sun foreshadows the final shot of Zhang Yimou's

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[53] Lee, Haiyan. "The Charisma of Power and the Military Sublime in Tiananmen Square." *Journal of Asian Studies* 70 (May 2011). 411.

[54] Ibid., 419.

[55] Ibid., 419. Lee also notes the shift since the brutal 1989 crackdown on student protestors that emphasizes the display of military hardware in place of the Maoist notion of a "people's war."

Fig. 4.20 Zhang Yimou also participated in the direction of the National Day Parade in 2009. ("The Big Picture," *Boston.com* 2009 October 1.).

directorial debut, *Red Sorghum*. The regeneration of the body politic in that film, in contrast to the deconstruction of the crowd through the excavation of its desolate ritualization in *The Big Parade*, is celebrated as a cultural myth predating the ruptures of history. The accessible, commercial appeal of *Red Sorghum*, the way it "announces to the people the continuation of history,"[56] also signaled a new era of filmmaking for the masses, based on the crowd not so much as an object of ideological interpellation (or aesthetic deconstruction in the films of the Fifth Generation), but as a viewing and consuming audience.

Red Sorghum (1987): The Crowd Goes to the Movies

[56] Dai Jinhua, "Severed Bridge," *Cinema and Desire*, 34.

With *Red Sorghum*, Zhang regenerates the notion of a Chinese body politic, both in the sense of re-visualizing a mythological "redness" that precedes political systemization, as well as re-apprehending the film audience not merely as a collective, ideological subject nor an analytical, critical viewer, but, in the end, a popular one. *Red Sorghum* often serves as the exemplary transitional film between the art-house, modernist style of the Fifth Generation and the commercialized, entertainment-driven mode of filmmaking that emerged as part of the state studios' institutional restructuring in the late 1980s.[57] Released in the midst of an ongoing debate over the social value of the "entertainment film" (*yule pian* 娛樂片), the success of *Red Sorghum* was proved not just by its enthusiastic domestic reception, but the critical praise and awards it earned internationally as well. As cinema's ability to address its audience as a cohesive, collective unit (in the manner of the political films of the Maoist era) diminished and industry aims shifted from ideological edification to the release of individual desires, including those of a consumerist nature.[58] Zhang refers to his film as a "bastard" (*zazhong* 雜種) work, the product of both an artistic sensibility and popular instincts, noting in his "Director's Statement on *Red Sorghum*," however, commercial and national interests are not opposed in his work:

> As the nation becomes strong and prosperous, the nature of its people is also inspired to develop. The people rely on this spirit just like trees depend on their bark; this is one layer of this film's most practical significance.

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[57] See, for example, Zhu, Ying. *Chinese Cinema During the Era of Reform: The Ingenuity of the System*. Westport: Praeger, 2003. 111-123; and Zhang, Yingjin. *Chinese National Cinema*. New York: Routledge, 2004. 238-240.

[58] For more on the debates over the entertainment film in the second half of the 1980s and early 1990s, see the section on "The Entertainment Film" in *Film in Contemporary China: Critical Debates, 1979-1989*. Eds. George S. Semsel, Chen Xihe, and Xia Hong. Westport: Praeger, 1993. 83-139; and director Wu Yigong's 吳貽弓 essay, "We Must Become Artists Who Deeply Love the People." Trans. Chris Berry. *Perspectives on Chinese Cinema*. Ed. Chris Berry. London, British Film Institute, 1991. 133-140.

> The sense of legend makes this film attractive. While just one may seem feigned, many together make it real; the bizarre details in this film keeps everyone firmly in their seats. 這樣國力才能強盛不衰，民性也便激揚發展。人靠精神樹靠 ，要説這片子的現實意義, 這也是一層。
>
> 傳奇色彩可以使這個電影好看，一人傳虛，萬人傳實，有些奇奇怪怪的具體事，大家也坐得住。[59]

Zhang reconciles his "red" use of the crowd with domestic profitability and his international acclaim through the very figure of the crowd, manifesting it onscreen through in powerful motifs of earthy ritual and historical spectacle, as well as in the cinematic attraction of offscreen audience. Prioritizing entertainment and box-office appeal over ideological didacticism (or art-house style deconstruction of such ideology) allows Zhang's film, much like the Opening Ceremonies more than two decades later, to operate as mass media in its dual sense: both as a product for, and of, the masses.

Zhang's use of the spectacular image and construction of a visual dynamic between the onscreen crowd and its audience, in the end, is not primarily about ideological propagation, but the mobilization of the visual medium of crowds to address collectivity. The ways in which Zhang uses the the crowd image to galvanize his work speaks to the ongoing appropriation of the revolutionary visual grammar of crowds in contemporary China. In Zhang's case, these "human wave tactics" become, perhaps ironically, a vehicle of audience expansion, a kind of currency that at once highlights the visual spectacularity of the crowd image while effectively rendering its immediacy and revolutionary potential as something absent. Borrowing the Maoist rhetoric of mass ritual and technological reproduction, Zhang's production of the visual spectacular at the

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[59] Zhang Yimou. "*Hong gaoliang* daoyan chanshu 《紅高粱》導演闡述" (Director's Statement on *Red Sorghum*). *Hong gaoliang: Zhang Yimou xiezhen* 紅高粱：張藝謀寫真 (Red Sorghum: Portrait of Zhang Yimou). By Luo Xueying. Beijing: Zhongguo dianying chubanshe, 1988. 72. For an example of Zhang referring to *Red Sorghum* as a "bastard," see Zhang Yimou. "Chang yizhi shengming de zange 唱一支生命的贊歌" (Sing a Song of Life). *Dangdai dianying* 當代電影 13.2 (1988). 82.

Fig. 4.21-22 Recalling Lu Xun's seminal moment of crowd recognition, in *Red Sorghum* Japanese troops assemble a crowd to witness a "public warning," or *shizhong*.

Fig. 4.23 The group of insurgents ritually prepare for their attack on the Japanese invaders.

Olympic Games in 2008 carries the traces of the fascination with the crowd image not only from his early film career, but also reveals an understated relation to the revolutionary era.

Coda: *Aftershock* (2010): The Crowd Is Missing

The Cultural Revolution was in many ways the pinnacle of the crowd image in China. Depictions of the crowd in the process of coming into being gave way to those of spectacular immanence – an unambiguous and sublime realization of the revolutionary mass. During the Cultural Revolution, the crowd image became inextricably bound to Mao's notion of "perpetual revolution" (*buduan geming* 不斷革命), not only animating theatrical and film productions, but also staged in the mass rituals of "struggle sessions" and political rallies, and inscribed into the everyday lives of millions. The bold visual language of the Model Operas, featuring elaborate routines of choreographed assemblages of dancers and actors moving in unison and forming enough repeated patterns to rival a Busby Berkeley musical, was matched by the fantastic imagery of the era's propaganda posters, nearly always highlighting the unity and strength of the crowd through stylized trademarks such as the unidirectional gaze, uniform gestures, and, perhaps most significant, an open-ended capacity to grow beyond the frame of the picture. The extension of the crowd image and its powerful pull into nearly all facets of social and visual life by means of technologies of mass reproduction during the Cultural Revolution is surpassed in imagistic magnitude and sublimity only by the figure of Mao himself, in looming singularity and transcendent wholeness.

Director Feng Xiaogang's 2010 blockbuster *Aftershock* begins during the tail end of the Cultural Revolution in 1976 and concludes in the Olympic year of 2008. This timeframe suggests a chronicle of the "new" China that has left behind the political intensity and collective fervor of the Maoist era and embarked instead on a course of reform and development. By bookending the narrative with two catastrophic earthquakes, however, Feng's reading of recent history suggest that he is up to something more complex than the linear, triumphalist narratives of other mainstream historical films (such as the same year's film it displaced as the biggest domestic box office draw in the PRC record books, *The Founding of the Republic* [Jianguo daye 建國大業, dir. Huang Jianxin 黃建新 and Han Sanping 韓三平]). *Aftershock* reminds viewers constantly of the massive loss of life that underscores the lived experience of this reform through repeated use of the crowd image. These images, rather than serving as the medium of nationalist rituals (exemplified in the Zhang Yimou-directed Opening Ceremonies, discussed above), are an abstracted and ghostly presence perceived in the remnants and memories that have survived.

Aftershock serves as a fitting conclusion to this chapter not just for the way in which it incorporates the crowd image, but for its ability to use the crowd image to open up a reading of history at the level of human memory. That is, the disembodied multiplicity that haunts Feng's film reminds us of the masses' disappearance in contemporary China. While the plot of the film concerns the tribulations of a single family, their personal loss and private memory are collectivized in *Aftershock*, and with it the possibility of reforming social bonds on the basis of the responsibility owed to those

lost. At the same time, *Aftershock* is quite unabashedly a commercial product, and embraces fully the idea of film as a mass medium. At the same time, *Aftershock* is quite unabashedly a commercial product, and embraces fully the idea of film as a mass medium. An unprecedented achievement of funding and technology, *Aftershock* was the first Chinese film to be financed in partnership with the Canadian company IMAX Corporation, which specializes in high-resolution film and huge-screen projection. The spectacle of *Aftershock* attracted audiences in droves, becoming the most successful film ever produced in China at the time.[60] The triumph of Feng's film speaks to not only the enormous appetite for movies, and especially blockbusters, in contemporary China (in 2011 IMAX announced a deal that will result in 300 theaters in China by 2016, compared to the 14 on which *Aftershock* premiered),[61] but also testifies to the remarkable growth in the last two decades that has made China an economic and technological powerhouse. Feng's talent for tapping into popular sentiment is what has made him one of the most successful film directors in China, but he is also keenly aware of the limitations of political filmmaking. In *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, Deleuze writes that while in classical cinema the idea "the people are already there, real before being actual, ideal without being abstract," in modern political cinema "the people are what is missing."[62] While I am not sure if *Aftershock* would be sufficiently "minor" for Deleuze, I do take my cue from the way that "the missing people" are figured in the midst of "becoming …

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[60] *Aftershock* was knocked out of this position later at the turn of 2011 by *Let the Bullets Fly* (Rang zidan fei 讓子彈飛, dir. Jiang Wen 姜文).

[61] Barnes, Brooks. "Imax to Open 75 New Theaters in China." *New York Times*. 24 March 2011. http://www.nytimes.com/2011/03/24/business/media/24imax.html? Accessed 27 August 2012.

[62] Deleuze, Gilles. *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*. Trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989. 215-217.

in new conditions of struggle."[63] The persistence of the crowd image in Feng's film, then, speaks to the struggle over the collective memory of the Chinese masses.

Even before the title frame of the film, we are carried into the setting by a swarm of dragonflies that portend not just the terrible catastrophe about to strike, but also the proliferation of crowd images throughout the film. The majority of the film's crowds, however, take an abstracted form in death and memorial, from the countless corpses of the earthquake's victims to the fires burning in remembrance of those lost, to, in the film's final series of shots panning across the Tangshan memorial wall, the inscribed names of those who perished. Feng Xiaogang uses these crowd images both to make the fullest use of the spectacular cinematic form, and to maximize the collectivity embedded in the film-watching experience. In this sense, the use of CGI technology that overwhelms with the spectacle of destruction, and extends the procession of military, refugees, and gravestones to the horizon recalls Sun Yu's exploration of the crowd's particularly cinematic resonance in *Big Road* seven and a half decades earlier. Unlike Sun's film, however, which filmically projects a revived crowd into the dream of revolution, the abstractions of multiplicity in *Aftershock* evoke the crowd's particular post-revolutionary absence. Shelly Kraicer asks if the teary melodrama of the family's struggles and ultimate reunion in *Aftershock* may also signal the sentimental release of "a country that recognizes the emotional patterns of its own experiences in the film?"[64] As the melodramatic intensity of spectacle overtakes the first half-hour's disaster, the senses

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[63] Ibid.

[64] Kraicer, Shelly. "Tremors and Trauma: Notes on Three Chinese Earthquake Movies." *dGenerate Films*. 14 September 2010. http://dgeneratefilms.com/shelly-kraicer-on-chinese-film/shelly-on-film-tremors-and-traumas-notes-on-three-chinese-earthquake-movies/. Accessed 27 August 2012.

of loss and trauma are drawn from a deep repository of popular memory. Those who saw the film in the theater often testify to the contagious nature of weeping during the film, and the collective catharsis proved a strong attraction to Chinese audiences. The film serves, therefore, as not just an excavation of the catastrophe at Tangshan, but a collective mourning ritual over the repeated historical ruptures of China's recent past. The cinematic palimpsest suggested in the ghostly resurrection of the crowd in *Big Road* finds its echo in *Aftershock*, but with a twist: rather than the masters of history, the very idea of the masses is borne from the shared memory of loss, suffering, and sacrifice.

The national and collective nature of the catastrophic trauma is further reinforced by two additional historical moments: the first is the death of Chairman Mao, which occurred only a few months after the Tangshan earthquake. Mao is not named, and pictured only briefly. Instead, the momentous event is represented in a montage of mourning ceremonies, beginning with actual historical footage of masses of mourners filling Tiananmen Square that cannot but evoke, even in contrast, the throngs of Red Guards that Mao had mobilized at the height of the Cultural Revolution in the fall of 1966.[65] These shots of Mao's funeral signal the demise not only of the Great Helmsman, but also the exhibition of spectacular crowds as the dominant aesthetic mode of national representation during the Cultural Revolution, and moreover begs the question of weighing the loss of a single man against the hundreds of thousands of victims of Tangshan, or the millions of victims of the Cultural Revolution. The ceremonial context

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[65] The montage in *Aftershock* crosscuts between several scenes of mourning, purposefully echoing the style of the moment of silence portion of the official film produced after Mao's death, *Eternal Glory to the Great Leader and Teacher Chairman Mao Zedong* (Weida de lingxiu he daoshi Mao Zedong zhuxi yongchui buxiu 偉大的領袖和導師毛澤東主席永垂不朽), self-consciously signaling the role film itself plays in the formation of memory.

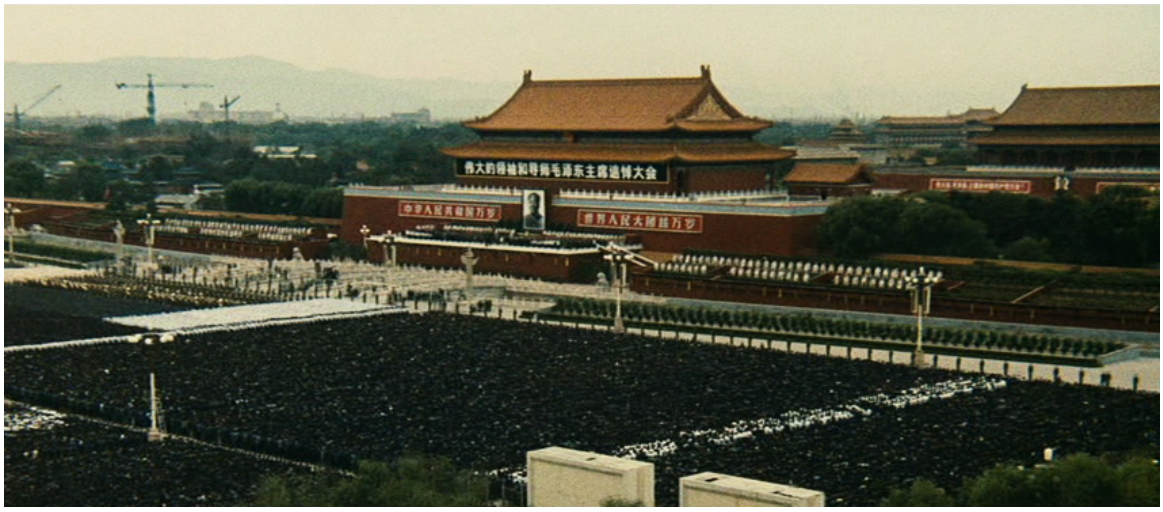

Fig. 4.24 Hundreds of thousands gathered in Tiananmen Square to mourn the death of Chairman Mao. Feng Xiaogang uses this historical footage in *Aftershock*.

of the ornamental figure of the crowd conjures the mythical, revolutionary possibilities they have inherited, its belatedness, appearing at a distinctly post-revolutionary moment, promises not plentitude, but spectral, and spectacular, absence.

The second event is the catastrophic earthquake centered in Wenchuan County in Sichuan in May of 2008. In *Aftershock*, the outpouring of empathy that drives the brother and sister to volunteer reunites them, providing the narrative with an impossibly neat closure while also emotionally connecting the two disasters in the filmic imagination. Critics have noted that while there is the potential for a critical interpretation in Feng's rendering of the Tangshan earthquake, the scenes in Sichuan hue closely to the government-sanctioned narrative of the heroic devotion of the People's Liberation Army in the rescue efforts.[66] The differences in style, however, may also provoke questions concerning this official version of history. *Aftershock* concludes with a gesture to a wall

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[66] Journalist Richard Bernstein quotes a Chinese friend that claims if the PLA was really meant to be the hero of the film, they would have simply lifted the slab off of both the mother's children, saving her the agonizing decision of choosing which to rescue. Instead, it is ordinary volunteers and workers leading the rescue efforts. See Bernstein, Richard. "Filmmaking in a Climate of Caution." *New York Times*. 11 August 2010. http://www.nytimes.com/2010/08/12/world/asia/12iht-letter.html. Accessed 27 August 2012.

Fig. 4.25-27 Images of multiplicity populate the film *Aftershock* as a visual reminder of the massive loss of life that occurred at Tangshan. Fires burned in remembrance of lost family members, crowded cemeteries, and the city's memorial wall each signify a different, ghostly idea of "the masses" distinct from its ideological form.

as a metaphor of the collectivity that binds China together as a nation; rather than the nationalist appeal of the Great Wall (prevalent in such films as *The Big Parade* and *Hero*, both discussed above), however, the Tangshan memorial wall somberly symbolizes the bonds, not just of victimhood, but of memory.[67] The film's overall theme of fragmented histories left unresolved and the repeated use of the crowd image to evoke the haunting loss of those disappeared are ways of inscribing the past onto the present, yet also show the politics of erasure at work. In this way, *Aftershock* participates in the same dynamic of history-making and erasure as *Prairie Fire*, and both films are myths of origins of sorts. Whereas *Prairie Fire* writes the crowd as a mythical figure of coming-into-being, Feng's film confronts this myth through the subtle imagery of its disappearance.

Aftershock is unquestionably a product of the commercial, transnational, mass culture that dominates mainstream film production in contemporary China, and its combination of epic sweep, melodramatic tension, and nationalist appeal played a huge role in its unprecedented box-office success. But in the way that it conjures the memories of another, invisible crowd, the film is also writing a different kind of mass history, a collective history of fragments. Each of the three films examined so far in this chapter accede to the dominant narrative of mass politics in modern China, one in which the crowd is endowed with qualities that project the collective imagination of a nation. At the same time, the representational practices and cinematic effects of these images also

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[67] The process by which the memorial wall came into being and the inscription of the names is not without controversy, however. While a memorial for the soldiers who participated in the rescue efforts has existed since 1986, the nearly quarter of a million who lost their lives have had very little commemoration. Completed in 2004, the government-sanctioned Tangshan memorial's sponsors, the Hebei Huaying Group (*Hebei Huaying jituan* 河北華盈集團), charge 800 to 1000 RMB as a "labor fee" to etch victims' names into the granite wall. See Soong, Roland. "The Tangshan Earthquake Memorial Wall." *EastWestSouthNorth*. 28 July 2006. http://www.zonaeuropa.com/20060728_1.htm. Accessed 27 August 2012.

produce a haunting effect that may complicate, or even undermine, that presumed trajectory.

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